

THE JESSE JAMES STORIES

A WEEKLY DEALING WITH THE DETECTION OF CRIME

Issued Weekly. By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at New York Post Office by STREET & SMITH, 238 William St., N. Y.

No. 46.

Price, Five Cents.

JESSE JAMES' RAILROAD

OR
THE OUTLAW BROTHERHOOD AT BAY



CRACK! FROM THE LEVELED REVOLVER OF JESSE JAMES, AND THE FOREMOST TRACK-LAYER FELL WITH A BULLET IN HIS BRAIN.

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JESSE JAMES' RAILROAD:

OR,

The Outlaw Brotherhood at Bay.

By W. B. LAWSON.

CHAPTER I.

THE JAMES BOYS AND THE TRACK-LAYERS.

"Come, boys, what are ye lookin' at? Think we come out here on a Sunday school picnic, and you got nothin' to do but to gawp at the scenery! Git a wiggle on ye!"

"If ye plase, boss, there was a coople av horsemin coming over the roise beyant thim——"

"Horsemen be blanked, Pat!" snapped in the foreman of the track-layers. "If they have business with us they'll have time to wag their chins after they get here, and we don't have to be wastin' time gazin' at 'em. Take hold of that rail there, John! Don't you show up them teeth of your'n in a grin, Spotty, for I ain't jokin'. I'll have every mother's son of ye bounced if ye don't git on to your job. Come, come, git a wiggle on!"

The Chinaman, addressed as John, smilingly seized hold of a steel rail. Spotty, an Italian, with

his face specked with powder, which had been blown into it in a blast, jumped to help. Two others already had a hold, and the rail was lifted.

But Pat, the Irishman, did not hustle in obedience to the commands of Gough, the foreman.

The latter was a New England man, and he was a terror when it came to getting work out of a gang of men. He kept them going like a slave-driver.

All but Pat, who had been a section boss himself, and would be one now but for irregular and long-continued spreeds.

He continued to gaze at the horsemen, who were now within easy hailing distance.

"The devil moight loike the looks av thim jays on horseback, but Oi'll be dimmed if Oi do!" he piped, in his Irish tenor.

Gough stepped up and fetched a cuff at the Irishman's cheek. Gough was mad if a man didn't tumble over himself the instant he told him a thing to do.

The Irishman dodged the clip, and his hard fist made a back-hand sweep that sent Gough on to his back.

It was the first time they had come to blows, and the spectacle was one that the other workmen had to stop and admire.

The rail which had been lifted was dropped before it had been carried a yard toward its final resting-place.

There was not much sympathy for Gough lying round loose in the gang, for not a man of them liked to be ordered about and sworn at fifty times a day, when he was doing as well as he could.

But they were afraid of the foreman. He was not a large man; but his voice had business in it, and he acted all the time as if he were ready to knock anybody down who should answer a word back to his bossing.

"Pat get-a him head broke!" grunted the Italian.

Similar expressions passed from lip to lip among the gang.

But Pat did not act scared. He saw the boss kicking in a clumsy attempt to regain his feet, and that proved that the man was not seriously hurt. That was all Pat cared about just then, except the fact that the suspicious horsemen whom he had been observing were approaching at a more leisurely pace, and that each carried a Winchester in a handy position.

Pat McGraw had been a cow-puncher in Texas, among other trades, and he knew how a certain kind of roving gentry carried their Winchesters. Indeed, Pat had punched cattle thieves and other kinds of desperadoes, as well as cattle, and when it came to spotting shady characters on the plains of the Southwest he had the eye of a hawk.

He looked around at the faces of the crew of track-layers.

They were a common, stupid, muscular lot of men, of the kind to let a man like Gough abuse them without kicking.

Pat wished just then that he had hit the foreman a harder clip, so as to keep him out of the affair a little longer. Then he could have acted as boss, and used his judgment in dealing with the suspicious strangers, who were at that moment riding up to where they stood.

But Gough jumped up, and his hand flew to his hip. Out came a revolver, and Pat was covered.

Pat McGraw had no gun of any kind, for the workmen on the new railroad were allowed to carry no weapons.

"You infernal bog-trotter!" roared Gough, as Pat backed away from the threatening pistol. "Get down on your knees and beg my pardon for hitting me that clip, or I'll blow the top of yer head off!"

Pat was not looking at Gough, and he seemed to

have no apprehensions about the safety of the top of his head.

He saw the two horsemen pull up within the length of a horse of Gough, and the younger of the two covered the foreman with his Winchester.

"Turn the muzzle of the gun the other way, pilgrim, and pass it here!" commanded the voice of the stranger.

Gough wheeled, quick as lightning, carrying the revolver round as he went, and without turning the muzzle toward his own person as he was ordered.

He was surprised, but the appearance of new foes only made the rage of his blood the more furious.

He would have shot at the strangers without a word; but the man who covered him with his Winchester did not give him time.

The whiplike report, the snarl of death agony, the snap of the revolver as it flew upward and was discharged harmlessly, all blended into one sound.

Gough fell, and the track-layers were without a foreman for that section.

Pat was the bravest man of the whole crew, but the bravest men don't throw their lives away. They give them, cheerfully, in a good cause; but they realize that they can do that but once, and they want to get some return for it for somebody.

"Gentlemen," spoke up the Irishman, with a show of empty palms; "ye've dropped the only pig-headed wan in the crowd, and there's nothing the matter wid bein' fri'nds wid the rist av us!"

"Pass out your guns, then," ordered the same stern voice which had given the order to Gough.

"Oi've nayther gun or pistol, your honor."

"Aren't you one of the bosses?"

"By good roights Oi would be the only wan on earth, yer honor, but a cruel fate ordered otherwise. It is loikely, howiver, that Oi'll have to do the bossin' on this section until they get another man here, owing to the sickness which a wise Providence sames to have brought upon the gentleman that lies yonder."

The stern-faced stranger who had shot Gough lowered his Winchester, and flung himself lightly from his saddle.

"His companion followed his example, and at the same time said:

"We own the gang all right, Jess, and the quicker we get them back on to their job the better."

"Don't be too sure about owning them, Frank," replied the other, while his keen eyes swept over the crowd of track-layers.

The latter were accustomed to obeying, without demur, any one who might be given authority over them; but that did not mean that they would be submissive to capture by a couple of desperadoes.

While none of them had had the experience which Pat had been through, yet most of them had roughed

it as laborers in a railroad construction gang before this.

As they saw the stern-faced men dismount, they little suspected that one was Jesse James, the king of American bandits.

One of the track-layers suddenly waved his pick as a signal. As by magic, every man seized a pick, sledge-hammer, spike or tie, and made a rush toward the two outlaws.

Crack! from the leveled revolver of Jesse James, and the foremost track-layer fell with a bullet in his brain.

The other members of the gang were for the moment staggered by the death of the boldest of their number. But, without a real leader, and seeing that they had only two foes to cope with, they were emboldened to make a dash upon the cool pair who confronted them.

The weapons which they wielded were of a formidable character, if they were to come to close quarters. For that matter, the beginning of the fight was at sufficiently close quarters to make the spikes effective, should the latter be hurled with precision.

But the superior numbers of the track-layers rendered them over-confident.

They made a headlong dash toward the foe, and probably not a man of them doubted but that the two strangers would either spring to the backs of their horses and beat a precipitate retreat, or be overwhelmed by the onslaught.

Pat McGraw alone knew that they had no ordinary enemy to deal with, and, even as the track-layers sprang to the attack, the voice of the Irishman rang out:

"Howld on, crazies! Ivery mother's son av yez will—there, and Oi towld ye so!"

The last part of the speech was uttered as the James brothers were seen to spring a little to one side of the line of attack, while at the same time both of them began pumping lead with both hands, the four revolvers sputtering as if a whole company of soldiers had received the order to fire.

Down went several of the track-layers, as if they had been mown by a scythe. Those in the rear stumbled headlong over the quivering bodies of their fallen comrades, and so the dead and the living were mixed together in a confused and writhing mass.

Only Pat McGraw was clear of the *mêlée*.

He made no attempt either to escape or to take part in the fight.

On the other hand, the quick eye of Jesse James took in the fact that the Irishman recognized the situation, and that he would have counseled surrender for the track-layers. And Jesse James was not going into the affair without a definite scheme behind his action.

The truth was he did not wish to kill any more of the laborers than he could help.

He had other use for them.

The men, as soon as they found that they were merely rushing to their death, made haste to fall back.

Some of them dropped the implements which they held for defense. Others started to run away.

"Halt!"

The command was from Jesse James.

The tone, rather than the word, was effective.

The half-dozen track-layers who were running came to a stop. They dropped their weapons, and their hands went up in token of surrender.

"There, b'yes," cried Pat, "now ye're comin' to yer sinses. The gintlemen yander have the drap on yez, and it is loikely thot they mane no harrum if yez stand and deliver yer poipes, tobacky and other valuables—the saints know that it is divil a cint of money that ye have to give thim!"

The James boys coolly put up their revolvers, and while Frank kept an eye on the workmen to see that they neither attempted to run away nor to renew their resistance, Jesse advanced to meet McGraw.

The latter put out his hand, while a grin overspread his small, bristly face.

"It isn't the first toime that Oi iver shook hands wid the divil, and it is loike that it won't be the last, and it isn't meself thot would be for putin' on aires," he said.

The face of Jesse James did not relax, but he touched the hand of the Irishman in acknowledgment of the greeting.

"You ain't the boss of this gang, I take it?" he asked.

"The boss lies where he fell, yander."

"Isn't there one among you that can keep the men at their work?"

"It is meself thot can do thot, if there be somebody to kape me at the bossin'."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Oi have a wakeness for whisky, so it is said, and thot stands in the way of my bein' prisidint of the United States, so Oi have been towld."

"Where do you keep your whisky?"

"Oi don't kape it; Oi dhrink it, dim the stuff!"

"No fooling, man—this is a serious business. I want the work to go on here, and the sooner you get the track so that a train can run over it to the line of mountains yonder the better. They are working at that end to meet your gang, and a few days will lay the track over this level stretch, if you hustle. You understand me. You must let whisky alone."

"How can Oi? The dimmed stuff makes a jump for me ivery toime Oi come within smellin' distance of it. It has a koind of affinity wid me t'roat——"

"Enough of that foolery, man!" snapped Jesse James. "If there is any whisky here in your camp, I'll take possession of it. You will set these men to

work, and keep them at it. Assure them that I will shoot the first man of them that doesn't put in lively work. Will you do that?"

"Wid pleasure, sur-r."

"At it, then."

"Moight I ax ye a question?"

"Yes."

"What official of the railroad moight Oi have the honor of addressin'?"

"I own the road—for the time being, at least. My name is Jesse James."

Pat flung up his hands.

"Wull, Oi'll be dimmed!"

Then he turned to the track-layers.

"Go to worruk!" he cried; "Oi'm boss!"

CHAPTER II.

AN ORDER FOR A DANCE.

Pat McGraw soon demonstrated his ability to boss a gang of track-layers.

As soon as he made them understand the necessity of keeping them at their work, they went at it with more enthusiasm than they had shown before.

While several of their number had been shot to death by the bandits, they did not spend time in mourning for them. As for Gough, it was a positive relief to be rid of him, and to have Pat McGraw in his place.

The Irishman understood the art of keeping on the good side of the men without losing the power of authority over them, and, while he ordered them right and left, and kept them hustling all the time, it was with a good humor that made them willing.

But Pat was not so submissive to Jesse James as he pretended.

To allow the bandit chief to take possession of the uncompleted railroad was a sort of proceeding that he did not relish. He racked his brain for a scheme by which he might hope to outwit the desperadoes.

He knew that a construction train would arrive from the east at about sunset, bringing a lot of steel rails, spikes and ties.

The train had a long haul to make, and drew only two loads a day.

As he thought of it, another fact occurred to him, and it started the sweat on his freckled brow.

It was payday, and with the construction train would come the paymaster's car, with money for Gough's and three other gangs.

The latter were at work out beyond the low foothills from which Jesse and Frank James had come.

The road was being built from that direction also, and the two sections were fast nearing each other.

The mountain sections of the road were supplied with rails from the other end, but the pay all came

from the eastern terminus, where the superintendent's and other offices were located.

An armed and mounted messenger carried the money from this end of the completed line to the mountain section. The payments were made fortnightly, as a matter of safety and convenience, and, although the amount of cash disbursed along this part of the line was not large, yet it amounted to a snug sum—enough, Pat reflected, to make a hold-up worth while to the James boys, unless they had something bigger on hand.

As a matter of fact, they did have a greater haul in sight, but they meant to make sure of the paymaster's car also, as a "matter of principle," as Jesse expressed it.

All this was turned over in the mind of Pat McGraw, as he ordered the construction gang about as if he had nothing else on his mind.

He wished that there were more intelligent men under him—some in whom he might confide his plans and suspicions.

But, as a matter of fact, they were but little more efficient in the matter of intelligence than the horses which were also employed to shift the heavy materials from the place where the train dumped them to a point closer to the line of construction.

Jesse James stood near for some time and observed the workers with that peculiarly searching gaze which it was so hard to evade.

At the same time it was certain that he furtively observed Pat McGraw, and that he made up his mind that the latter was not so simple as he appeared.

Whatever he may have thought about it, he vouchsafed no remark. Frank James was keeping an eye out in another direction the while. Jesse approached him and said:

"We have got things to going tolerably well here and twenty-four hours more of it, with the gang working extra time, will bring the two sections together. Then we'll own a railroad."

"If there is no hitch in proceedings," said Frank, who had his eye on a smooch of smoke appearing on the eastern horizon.

"What do you see?"

"Construction train coming, I reckon."

"Ah! same as we had to tackle at the other end. Only there are only two of us here, if Talcott and his trio fail to get here in time. I'll have to pump that Irishman for pointers, so as to know what we have got to run up against. And, Frank, the Irishman is deep as a well. See the show he is making at bossing the track-layers."

"The work he puts in he thinks is all in the interest of the railroad company in the end."

"And so may get him a steady job as boss—that's the idea. A foxy fellow, and not sorry that we sent the other one up the flume. I'll work him for the pointers."

"And of course he'll give you Gospel truth, Jess!"

"He can do as he likes about that. But if he has half the wit he makes a show of, he'll go slow about giving me any crooked yarns."

The gleam in the cold gray eyes of Jesse James boded ill to Pat McGraw as he approached the latter.

"Pick up thot spike, John, and lave yer fumblin' wid the hammer," the Irishman was saying to the Chinaman, who was clumsy with the sledge, and handy with most other implements.

"See here, man—what is your name?"

Jesse James spoke the question, and tapped Pat on the arm as he uttered it.

"Me name, is it?" repeated Pat, as if taken by surprise.

"Yes, and no beating about the bush. The questions I'm going to put to you can mostly be answered with one word to each—yes or no. You will use no unnecessary words, mind. Your name, now?"

"Yis, or no," sprang to Pat's lips. But the gaze from the eyes of the bandit king seemed to go straight to his heart, and to make it beat very slow, as if it were about to stop.

"Oi must lave jokin' wid the divil!" was his mental conclusion, and aloud he answered:

"Pat McGraw."

"How many times a day does the construction train arrive from the east?"

"Twice."

"How many men accompany it?"

"That depinds. It takes about a dozen to run the train, countin' the ingineer, firemen and brakemen."

"Why are there sometimes more than that?"

Pat hesitated. He was thinking of the pay car, and he realized that he had said more than was called for.

The bandit king, observing every expression on the Irishman's face, shrewdly guessed the truth.

"Sometimes the construction super, comes out to take a look at the gangs," said Pat.

"How about the pay car?"

"Av coorse that comes whin it is toime."

"And it is coming now, isn't it?"

The eyes of Jesse James bored into the foreman, and the latter knew that they read the truth.

"Yis, Oi expect it will come to-night."

"Have you any idea how much cash it carries?"

"There are three gangs to pay, and some salaried min at the other ind of the road. Oi niver figured out more than what should be comin' to meself."

"How much time is due?"

"Two wakes."

"I can figure close enough, Pat, and you needn't let it trouble you. Does the pay car have a guard?"

"Two or three min, thot is all."

"Game?"

"They can foight."

"Keep the men lively till I tell you different. I see you have tents pitched further down toward the foothills for your camp for the night. There will be a moon to-night, and you will keep things moving two hours later than usual."

"Oi suppose ye'll be afther takin' charge of the money in the pay car, Misther James?"

"Tend to your business, Pat."

"There'll be a divil of a kick whin the min don't get their cash!" muttered Pat, and Jesse James smiled.

The smoke from the approaching train became more plain against the sky, and soon the rumble of the laden trucks became audible.

Frank James was smoking coolly, but Jesse cast frequent glances back toward the foothills, from which direction he looked for one Talcott, with several other members of a recently organized gang. He knew that to hold up the coming train, guarded as it was, with only himself and Frank to manage the crew would be a considerable undertaking.

Pat McGraw was a dangerous element in the calculation, and yet he could not afford to shoot the man, since the work of laying the track would be sure to fall behind without a competent boss to keep the men to their tasks.

The construction train loomed into full view, and it would arrive in five minutes. Then Jesse spoke to Pat:

"I'll have to get you to help me a bit now. Do you think I could put a bullet through your heart at ten paces?"

"Oi'll be dimmed if Oi would like to have ye thry it!"

"Well, that is what I will do on the first sign of treachery. Let me tell you that you will come out of this o. k. if you go easy. You know that I can handle your men here like so many cattle. Can you sing?"

"Like a mockin' bird."

"And dance?"

"Any koind of a reel or breakdown!"

"As the train pulls in you will sing and dance as if there was a quart of whisky inside of your jacket."

"It'll make me toired widout the whisky, but Oi'll thry!"

CHAPTER III.

HOLDING UP THE PAY TRAIN.

It was an odd sight, when the construction train, with the pay car hauled at the tail end, rumbled and jolted as far as the unfinished state of the road would allow, and there came to a halt.

Most of the men had left their work, as much puzzled by what they saw as were the engineer and fireman aboard the locomotive by the sudden antics of Pat McGraw.

Jesse James had already had the bodies of Gough and the dead track-layers hauled to a spot beyond a pile of railroad ties, which concealed them sufficiently so that they might not betray to the train hands what had taken place.

Pat McGraw had drawn a little apart from the workmen, and, striking into a rollicking song, was keeping time by dancing a breakdown.

When he entered into a thing, he did so with his whole soul, whisky or no whisky.

He did so then.

His voice rang out in a tenor that was as clear as the tones of a cornet. And his heels and toes flew up and down with the wildest abandon, his body twisting and swaying with a gracefulness which would not have been looked for in a laborer who was past the prime of life in the matter of years.

The track-layers looked on in mute wonder.

They thought that Pat must have been treated to some whisky.

They had never seen the man act so crazy.

But the astonishment of the train hands could not be described.

The James brothers had dropped behind another pile of ties close to the track. There, with Winchester ready to speak, they waited for the next act in the drama.

From the pay car stepped a handsome, well-groomed gentleman of fifty-five. He was followed by a younger man, and the latter carried a Winchester in a careless manner, as though he had no idea that he should have occasion to use it.

The older man was Gilbert Farnum, division superintendent of the road. He was making the trip unexpectedly, so far as Gough would have been concerned, if alive.

He had horses aboard the train, and was intending to go on with three companions to the sections beyond the foothills.

He had just been chosen to the superintendency of this division, and this was his first trip out to see what sort of a route he was to take care of.

He had never seen Pat before, but had met Gough, and he naturally looked for the latter as soon as he got off the train.

"Where is the boss, Raynor?" he asked of the man with the Winchester.

"There don't seem to be any. That fellow singing and dancing is McGraw, the best workman on the line, but he is full of whisky, I reckon," said Raynor.

"But where is Gough? And the whole gang seems to be watching the Irishman. They act queer enough. I don't like the looks of things."

"Shall I go ahead and see what is the matter, Mr. Farnum?"

"Yes."

Raynor advanced along the length of the train,

and at the same time two of the brakemen got off and joined him.

"Pat is pretty full, and going in for a good time before the pay gets to him," said one.

"I don't see why Gough let him have whisky before the day's work was done. And where is Gough, anyway?"

"Don't see him."

"Can it be that he has been drinking, too, on the quiet, and that he hasn't been tending to his business?"

"I shouldn't wonder."

They were at this moment opposite the pile of ties behind which the James brothers were crouching.

Raynor saw something flash in front of his face, then felt a crushing blow that sent him to earth insensible."

His companions wheeled, and their hands flew to their hips.

"Drop that trick—it is our call!"

The words were like the ring of steel from the lips of Jesse James, and the two brakemen saw the muzzles of Winchesters almost against their breasts.

They staggered, appalled at the sudden and terrible danger. But no outcry escaped them; they knew that their lives depended on silence then, and they were not ready to throw their lives away at an unknown price.

"Here, out of sight quick as you can!" was the next order.

The men obeyed. No sooner had they done so than a noose dropped over both—for they stood close to each other—and jerked their heads together, holding them like a yoke.

They made no resistance, for they well knew that it would mean death for them to do so. Nor did they utter an outcry.

In an incredibly brief space of time they were thrown to the ground, disarmed, bound and gagged. It was all done before Mr. Farnum had advanced half the length of the train.

From his position, and the location of the pile of ties, he could not see the encounter by which Raynor and the two brakemen were overpowered.

Not so, however, at the forward end of the train.

The engineer and fireman, accustomed as they were to keeping a lookout in all directions, both saw a part of the brief struggle between the brakemen and the outlaws.

They jumped from the engine and signaled frantically back to Mr. Farnum.

The latter was bewildered by the mysteriousness of the situation. There appeared to be trouble, but not a shot had been fired, and there was no outcry to indicate the perpetration of violence.

His impression was that it all had something to do

with the strange antics of Pat McGraw, who was still dancing and singing as if he went by steam.

That both the Irishman and Gough, the foreman had succumbed to a spree was his natural thought. At the same time he had a premonition that there might be danger of some kind in the situation to the one who was in his care in the passenger coach at the rear end of the train.

That one was his beautiful daughter, Molly Farnum.

She was accompanying him on his trip to the mountains for pleasure, and that there could be anything like real danger in the expedition, they did not dream. For, while the precaution to guard the pay car was always taken, this was not because there had been any hint of a hold-up at any time since work on that part of the road had begun.

With this one apprehension, Mr. Farnum hastened back toward the pay car.

Meanwhile, having made the brakeman and guard secure—which took but a moment of time—Jesse and Frank James made a swift run along the opposite side of the train and reached the pay car simultaneously with the superintendent.

Farnum had his foot on the step of the car when Jesse James sprang to the platform from the other side and presented his Winchester.

"Don't yell—not a whimper!" cautioned the bandit king.

There was a husky sound in Farnum's throat, and that was all. His life was not so precious for its own sake, but he thought of Molly.

"You—you are——"

"We are Jesse and Frank James," chipped in the latter, as he thrust himself past his brother and stood at the door of the car.

"Heavens!" gasped the superintendent.

Then he became silent, waiting, evidently, for the next word from his captors.

That came quickly enough, for Jesse James knew that the conditions were unfavorable for delay.

But the most important step toward obtaining complete possession of the train had been made.

"How many men are there inside this car, Mr. Farnum?" demanded Jesse.

"There are two. My daughter is also there. I have heard, Mr. James, that you respected women——"

"With just the same measure that they respect me, and no more, Mr. Farnum; so don't try to beg off on that plea. This train and all there is in it is ours. Your daughter has nothing to fear, unless she attempts to balk us. Frank, relieve the gentleman of his guns, if he carries any."

This was quickly done.

Then Jesse James lowered his Winchester and covered the prisoner with a revolver instead.

"Now we will go in and take possession. Farnum

will lead the way and repeat my orders. If he quibbles or quavers, Miss Farnum will be fatherless."

"As she is motherless already!" murmured the superintendent.

"So much the worse," was the grim retort.

Frank James opened the door and stepped back.

Mr. Farnum well understood that there was but one thing for him to do, and that was to obey. Had it been merely a question of saving or losing his own life, he might have been willing to act the part of the hero and sacrifice it.

But that would avail nothing, he felt sure.

So, with a firm and unhesitating step, he passed into the car, with Jesse and Frank James close behind.

The car was fitted up in two compartments. The one at the rear contained luxurious chairs, like a Pullman coach. Here Molly Farnum was sitting, a book in her lap, but with her eyes gazing across the plain in the direction of the foothills.

"Molly," spoke her father.

She turned with a low, pleased exclamation.

"Oh, father!" she cried.

"Have no fears, Molly, but the train has been held up by desperadoes. They will take the money which we bring for paying the workmen."

Mr. Farnum tried to speak unconcernedly. Molly was a brave girl, and she had heard of hold-ups. But she saw the two stern-faced men back of her father, and both with revolvers in their hands.

She sprang toward them, terror in her face.

"Be silent, Molly!" said her father. "My life—perhaps yours also—depends on it!"

And she obeyed.

CHAPTER IV.

JESSE JAMES AND THE SUPERINTENDENT'S DAUGHTER.

In silence the girl stood in the aisle as her father, followed by the James boys, passed along the length of the compartment to the door that opened into the express division, where the safe and the guards waited.

That door was locked.

Beyond it the two guards sat playing cards, their guns handy, although they had no expectation of being called upon to make use of them.

"Knock for admittance," commanded Jesse James, in a low tone.

Farnum obeyed.

One of the guards sprang up.

"Who is it?" he demanded.

"Mr. Farnum."

"What is wanted?"

It was a hard place to put the superintendent. He felt that he was acting as the cat's paw of the bandits—as a decoy—a cowardly part.

Yet he well knew that even a word of warning from him would not save the treasure. Instead, he knew that it would only cost him his life, perhaps Molly's, probably the lives of the guards, besides.

The money must go—so he decided.

"Open the door for me," was his answer to the inquiry from the guard.

"Certainly, Mr. Farnum, if it is all right."

Farnum was silent; for to have said it was all right would have been a direct lie to play into the hands of the outlaws, and he could not bring himself to do that.

The door was opened without further ceremony, however.

The guard did not take his Winchester from its place. His companion still sat with the cards in his hand, but looked somewhat curiously toward the door, for the voice of Mr. Farnum had sounded a little unnatural.

The instant they looked through the open door and saw, first, the white, terror-stricken face of Molly, and secondly the invincible visages of the outlaws, they instantly divined what was the matter.

The guard who opened the door snatched at a revolver.

Bang!

The report was close to the ear of Mr. Farnum, from the weapon held by Jesse James. The bullet passed within an inch of the superintendent's ear, and the guard at the door fell, shot through the brain.

The other was on his feet, and so quick was he that his Winchester spoke next. But he feared hitting either Farnum or Molly, and the bullet was buried in the woodwork of the car.

Another crack from the revolver of Jesse James sealed the doom of the last of the faithful guards.

Farnum wheeled with white and desperate countenance.

"Assassins!" he cried, in desperation.

"Father, for my sake, be cautious!" spoke Molly.

She had become calmer than he. She saw that the action of Jesse James had been purely in self-defense. It was a matter of his shooting first or losing his life and the game at the same time.

"I'm not going to kill your father, Miss Farnum, unless he tries to be too brash, and I reckon he won't do that," declared Jesse James, speaking for the first time since the car had been entered.

As he spoke, his eyes met those of Molly Farnum in a direct glance. She was strangely thrilled by the look. There was no fierceness or threatening in it. For the moment all sign of cruelty had left his face.

The countenance of Frank James was more impassive just then.

As usual, when the moment for cautious action was at hand, the elder brother left the ordering and

leadership entirely with the younger and abler of the pair.

Entering the forward compartment of the coach, Jesse directed Farnum to take one of the chairs which had been occupied by a guard. Molly, in obedience to a gesture from the bandit chief, followed.

Frank closed and locked the door, and at the same time made sure that the forward door was likewise secure.

The safe was a small, ordinary affair, with a combination lock.

"Can you open it, Mr. Farnum?" demanded Jesse.

"Yes. On this trip I was to act as the paymaster."

"Lucky, for it saves smashing the car with a dynamite cartridge, and making a lot of noise. Come, twirl the knob."

Mr. Farnum obeyed, as he had done in everything else.

The cash in the safe was transferred to the possession of the outlaws, loosely tied up in a coarse sack.

"For my purpose," said Jesse, "this stuff is safer out of the safe than in it, though I've no idea of giving up possession of this train at present. But the safe would be a bother in case of trouble. I'm a little short-handed, you see, to handle the train and crew."

"Not more than a half-score of you outside, I suppose?" said Farnum.

Jesse James smiled faintly.

"What if I should tell you, Mr. Farnum, that my brother and I have done this little trick without other help?"

"Impossible!"

"We did it, just the same. But there is still an act or so in the drama that hasn't been presented, so you and your charming daughter will have to excuse us for a while. Frank, we will get the carrion out of here, so as not to offend the lady by the sight of it."

Molly had returned to the rear compartment, and sat with her face covered by her hands.

As Jesse James reached her side, he paused and looked down at her. Frank passed on and went out on to the platform to reconnoiter. He knew that there was great risk in thus leaving even a small part of the trainmen unguarded, although the time which had been occupied by the robbery of the pay car was in reality much briefer than it would seem by the time which it has occupied to relate the event.

"Miss Farnum," said Jesse James, bending over the girl and speaking in a low voice—a tone that sounded little like that which he used in delivering his commands.

She looked up and was thrilled to find the penetrating gaze of the bandit king fixed not unkindly on her face.

She trembled, but did not speak.

"You will tell of this event in future years, and horrify your friends by the statement that you were once face to face with that greatest of miscreants, Jesse James."

"You have done a cruel and murderous act!" she said, boldly, although her voice was low.

"In shooting the guards?"

"Yes. They were brave men."

"One nation robs a weaker one, and kills its brave men, but it isn't called murderous. Men are more cruel than I have been every day without breaking a law by which they may be made to suffer legally."

"Perhaps."

"This is my trade. I do not kill if I can accomplish my work without. I do not let other men get the drop on me, or stop me from doing what I attempt. I have been merciful to your father, and I have felt like being more so since I have seen his daughter. You have nothing to fear from me. I wish you might, when you return to civilization, say that the terrible Jesse James spoke kindly to you."

There was a strange power in the tones of the outlaw chief, and, knowing of the wonders which he had committed, and that he was even then defying great odds, she could not help but be impressed.

Here was a man who could hardly be in need of the cash which he had this day seized with so much hazard, who daily took his life in his hands, perhaps with no other purpose, many times, than for the chance to manifest his daring.

His name was a power and a terror throughout the district over which he roamed.

And yet she had read of acts of special mercy and kindness which he had done. And now he was speaking to her as gently and respectfully as she had ever been addressed in her life.

Upon an impulse which she could not resist she touched him lightly on the arm, and said:

"I shall tell my friends, if I ever see them again, that Jesse James is a great man gone wrong!"

Quickly the strange man bent and touched his lips to the hand which had rested so lightly for a single second on his arm.

Before she could quite realize what he had done, and that there had been no seeming disrespect in the impulsive act, the outlaw chief had passed out on to the platform, closing and locking the door behind him.

He saw his brother going along toward the forward end of the train at a run, and at the same time two or three rifle reports cut the air in a bunch.

A glance showed him that the engineer and fireman had left the engine, and had just released the brakemen whom they had left helplessly bound.

Raynor, the guard, had also been resuscitated, and three other brakemen, who had not before showed themselves, joined the little party.

But Jesse James did not fear these. His brother

had been approaching the group, and it was the engineer and firemen who had fired the shots which had just sounded on the air.

These were the only Winchesters then in possession of the trainmen. And Frank James continued to advance upon them as coolly as though he bore a charmed life.

CHAPTER V.

THE JAMES BOYS' BROTHERHOOD AMONG THE HILLS.

In thus taking possession of the new railway, which it was his purpose to have completed immediately and put to his own use, Jesse James was undertaking one of the boldest plays of his bold career.

But he did not expect to carry it through single-handed, or even with the help of his brother alone.

A brotherhood of picked men had been formed by him with the purpose of carrying out two or three specially bold schemes.

They numbered less than a dozen men, all told. But such was the individual record for valor or boldness of the members that they constituted the most powerful host he had ever called together.

The other end of the road, as has been stated, was already in the hands of Jesse James' men, and work of track-laying to meet the section on the open plain was being pushed rapidly.

He had left the gang in the foothills section under the direction of four of his most trusted men. The balance of the party, under the leadership of one Talcott, Jesse had expected to follow him closely, and to be on hand to take part in the train holdup.

The matter of capturing the construction gang he had been confident of carrying through with the help of his brother.

He did not understand the delay in the arrival of Talcott and the rest of the gang.

It is proper that this matter should be explained at this point, as the explanation will have a bearing on the thrilling events which were to follow, with startling import to the career of Jesse James.

An hour after the departure of Jesse and Frank James from the mountain section of the railway which was under construction, Talcott was ready with his companions to follow.

They soon left the construction gang out of sight. The roadbed had already been made ready for the rails and ties.

But Talcott, who was familiar with the mountains in that locality, did not follow the way which had been laid out for the railway, as that was somewhat crooked, to avoid a point which would have been more difficult for the construction of the road.

There was a shorter way, which called for some climbing, and afterward a steep descent.

This would bring them right out at the base of

the foothills, and in sight of the section which had been in charge of Gough.

Talcott was a well-built, nervous-looking man, strikingly handsome in face, but for a somewhat morose and moody expression which some past experience had made habitual to him.

He was an Eastern man of good breeding and a career which had been above reproach until, like many others, he became guilty of a breach of trust.

So, as a defaulter, he became a fugitive from justice.

He had come near to capture or death at the hands of officers who were on his track, and had been saved from that fate by Jesse James.

The bandit king had from the first taken a strong liking to this "man of mystery," as Talcott had been called.

The liking was reciprocated. It so came about that Talcott was one of Jesse James' most trusted members of the secret outlaw brotherhood which had been organized at about that time.

At the side of Talcott rode Cole Younger, who had lately joined the brotherhood, coming from the old gang that had been disbanded for several months.

Swanson, a gigantic Swede, rode close behind them, and close in the rear the rest of the party followed.

Suddenly Talcott's horse gave a wild snort and leaped to the very brink of the narrow track which they were following.

Most horses, under a similar impulse, would have thrown their riders over the precipice. But Talcott was a lover of horseflesh, and selected and trained all the horses that he rode.

So a gentle pull at the rein restrained the animal, and at the same time the rider was free to present his Winchester at a shadowy object that was moving stealthily down the rocks on the other side of him.

The sharp report startled the echoes, and these rattled back from the rocks like a fusillade from a company of infantry.

From below a yell went up—and it was a yell of mortal pain. At the same time an uncertain number of men were seen to dart out from the spot where they had been crouching below the trail, and make a run for cover on the other side.

"Give it to them, whoever they may be!" ordered Talcott.

Cole Younger and Swanson fired instantly at the flitting forms below them. But the unknown foe disappeared even as they did so. There was no sound to indicate that their shots had been of effect.

A moment afterward, however, several shots were fired up from the concealed enemy, and the bullets pattered on the rocks in uncomfortable proximity to the leading outlaws.

"This is a nasty business!" exclaimed Talcott. "We're in for a kind of work that we didn't bargain

for, and it is going to make us miss connections with our leader, unless I am greatly mistaken."

"Who d'ye make out those fellows to be?" queried Cole.

"How should I know? But can't you see that they are in ambush down yonder, and we can't get by them without giving them a chance to practice marksmanship on us at their pleasure!"

"We haven't got to pass that point where they are?"

"Not if we keep right on to the open plain. But can't you imagine that we will have something else to do?"

"What are you driving at, Talcott?"

"How about the railroad section that we have just captured, and the little party that we left on guard, to keep the gang at work?"

"You think there is danger of that crew yonder taking a hand in that part of the game?"

"Why, Younger, it is a sure thing. That's what they're here for. And I think there is a party big enough to give us a big fight, even if the James brothers were with us to help."

Cole Younger looked blue. He had had hard luck the last two or three times that he had acted as a supporter of the James boys. He was getting tired of it. He had received several ugly wounds, and there had been about the same number of close calls in escaping capture.

Many outlaws, like sailors, are superstitious, and Cole Younger was especially so. It seemed to him that he was made the especial mark of all the danger that came to the followers of Jesse James.

"I reckon Fate sets me up as a foil to keep death away from them brothers," he had lately remarked. "Their lives are charmed, the devil take them, and the stabs and bullets all glance off their hides and chug into mine!"

Up to the time that he had joined them, the new brotherhood of Jesse James had encountered nothing but the highest success.

They had not met with a single setback.

But they were evidently beset by a powerful hostile party—probably a nervy posse of deputies with orders to shoot every man they found in the mountains who did not give a satisfactory account of himself.

"So much for my linkin' fortunes with Jess James again!" growled Cole, settling back in his saddle as if he had made up his mind to spend the rest of the day right there, without another kick against fate.

"Don't croak," said Talcott; "we've got something to do, and the only question is how we can do it with the best chance of winning out. We aren't very far from the other railroad section. But the hills and rocks come in such a position that I don't believe the sounds of those shots were heard by Jesse James and his brother. So they will continue to ex-

pect us to arrive, and maybe get themselves into a fix where they will miss us mightily. At the same time, we must go back and find how things are with the rest of our gang. They may be surprised by the enemy and captured or wiped out."

"Then you say we must get back to them?"

"That is our first duty."

"And you feel sure, do ye, that Jess would tell you to do just that thing, if he was here?"

"He would have less wit than I have given him credit for, I think, if he ordered any other course."

"Well, then back we go."

Talcott had already turned back. They now struck into a gallop.

They had not yet gone far from the railroad where they had left a part of their gang to keep the track-layers to their work.

They were soon in sight of the section again.

As they rode into the cut they heard the clatter of iron-shod hoofs on the hard roadbed below the point where the track was being laid.

The laborers were stolidly lifting the rails and driving spikes. They seemed to care little whether they were working under orders from their employers, or from the outlaw captors.

Talcott had barely time to give a sharp warning shout to their men when twenty horsemen dashed into view, riding like mad, and yelling like demons!

CHAPTER VI.

TALCOTT'S PART IN THE BATTLE.

The situation of Talcott was not an enviable one for a man who had never lead in a mixed-up battle with desperate men, and with a desperate crew to command.

A glance told him what kind of material he had to contend against.

They were cowboys—and a nervy crew of them. Some were veterans in the service on the ranches; others were tenderfeet lately from the East. There were lately-graduated college men among them, with records in football and other athletics.

Such are not the easiest sort to "down" in a fight, and it sometimes seems as if they had rather fling their lives away for the sake of a glorious battle than to die in a decent and tame fashion.

Talcott, better than any one of his followers, understood the mettle of the crowd they had to encounter.

He knew they could not be bluffed or fooled.

They must be eluded or beaten fairly.

The little party with Talcott was heavily outnumbered.

For the moment it looked black for them, and Talcott devoutly wished that Jesse James was there to lead his men.

Then, at least, he would not feel that he was responsible for defeat.

But only for a moment did Talcott falter.

Cole Younger, in the light of his recent misfortunes, was in a mood to take to his heels and seek his own safety.

Not so, however, with the other men. The giant Swede was at the side of Talcott, and his heavy voice rumbled out the question:

"Shall we face 'em, or flee?"

"Take to the rocks, and waste no lead. At close quarters rip them with your knives!"

So ordered Talcott.

Cole Younger, still on his horse, wheeled as if he would ride up the track, and so try to escape.

"Back here!" shouted Talcott. "If you flunk, Cole Younger, you will have to account for it to Jesse James—and you know him better, perhaps, than I!"

That brought Cole around. The weakness had been momentary with him, because of his recent ill-luck. With the others he made a break for the shelter of the rocks, although they did not immediately leave the backs of their horses.

The track-layers were between the outlaws and the cowboys, and that kept the latter from doing any effective work with their guns.

But the laborers lost little time in getting out of the way.

By this time, however, the outlaws were well shielded by the rocks, and from this vantage point they began to send the bullets back with a rapidity and precision of aim that sent four of the cowboys toppling from their horses to the hard roadbed.

They fired another rattling volley back, but not a shot found a mark for which it was intended. Talcott had evidence that he was making a record for himself in the fact that a half-dozen of the shots pattered against the rock that shielded him, or flattened on the wall of granite behind him.

"They are beginning to hate and fear me," he grimly muttered. "And that is the way, I suppose, that it began with the record of Jesse James. Strange that I should have an ambition to be feared and hated, as he is!"

Strange, indeed. And yet it is so that the record of every noted outcast begins. And the greater the capacity of that man for greatness in an honorable career, the bitterer will be the struggle against him.

To excel, whether in good or evil, calls for the same kind of power, and Molly Farnum spoke truly when she said that Jesse James was a great man gone wrong.

The outlaws were not hemmed in, and they did not tarry under shelter of the rocks on that account.

Their object was to give battle to the cowboys, and that under conditions that would make the attacking party sick of the undertaking.

The track-layers were unarmed, as was the case with those on the open plain. They were a "mixed breed" as to nationality, and had no stomach for a fight either against the outlaws, or in defense of the track.

Therefore, when the cowboys came yelling into the cut, and the rifles and revolvers sputtered on both sides of them they were thrown into a panic.

Their first thought was for their own safety, and, in spite of commands from the cowboys to halt, they broke in a wild stampede for shelter.

This brought many of them near to the concealment of Talcott and the other outlaws.

A quick order from the temporary leader of the outlaw band placed revolvers in the hands of some of the most intelligent of the workmen, and these were given orders to join in the firing at the cowboys.

The four men of the outlaw party who had been left in charge of the section also joined in the resistance, and as a result the fire poured into the ranks of the attacking party was more than they could withstand.

Even the laborers who were compelled by Talcott to fire at their friends, were able to wound and cripple the horses of several of the enemy. And this told heavily against them.

Hardly—so it seemed—had the battle begun, before it was ended, and the cowboys, with two wounded, were in full retreat.

It was unlikely that they would thus easily give up the attempt to drive the outlaws away from the track section; but Talcott's men had at least a respite, and the laborers were immediately ordered back to their work.

Such was the condition of things at about the time that Jesse and Frank James were taking possession of the cash in the pay car on the eastern section which was under construction.

And this also explains why the contingent of the outlaw brotherhood expected by Jesse James did not arrive.

Seeing that Raynor, the guard, who had been merely stunned by a blow, had recovered and that he seemed to be leading the brakemen and other train hands in the first real show of resistance that had been made, Jesse lost no time in running to the side of his brother.

The latter seemed to be bent on advancing upon them single-handed.

A number of shots flew about him; but only Raynor knew how to handle a gun, and he was still shaky from the blow he had received.

The fact that Frank James seemed to feel no concern about the shooting which was being done with him as the mark still further "rattled" the clumsy marksmen. By that time the range was quite close, and Jesse reached his brother's side.

Then the brothers raised their Winchesters. Bang! bang!—almost as a single discharge.

Raynor and the fireman at his side fell without more than a deathsign from either. This disposed of all the Winchesters that were opposed to the outlaws, for the engineer had handed his to Raynor, the latter being the better marksman.

"Up with your dukes!" came the order from Jesse then, for he did not wish to shoot all the trainmen, having a better use for them.

The command was obeyed instantly.

The James boys, as usual, seemed to bear a charmed life, while every shot of theirs was a word of doom to a foe. And that told more than any weight of numbers could have done.

The trainhands were disarmed, and then, for the first time, there was not a man on the section who could have fired a shot at Jesse or Frank James.

Pat McGraw, meanwhile, had ceased his dancing. The object of his being compelled to indulge in such antics was, of course, to creat a diversion and mystification to the trainmen when the pay train pulled in.

"Put the men back to their work, McGraw," ordered Jesse James, when he had made the engineer and brakemen secure.

"Oi wad loike to sphake jist a worrud, Misther James," returned Pat.

"Speak it, then."

"Af ye wad have the min do lively worruk, it might be well to tell them that their pay wad be comin' before Christmas."

"Money if they work, bullets if they loaf! Tell them that," was the retort.

"Thot is the talk."

And Pat passed the word along to the men.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MUTINY.

Nightfall found the conditions around the captured construction and pay train comparatively peaceful, so far as appearances went.

Barely enough men belonging to the crew of the train were left to do the work which might be demanded of them, if the train were to make another trip.

Jesse James had virtually promised to pay off the track-layers. Pat passed along the promise, although, to tell the truth, he had little faith in it.

The other side of the promise—that there would be bullets for them if they did not work—Pat had no doubt but would be fulfilled to the letter. And it was this side of it that he laid the greater stress upon.

It was a moonlight night, and, under the command of the bandit brothers, the work of track-laying was

pushed as vigorously after sunset as it had been in the daytime.

For that matter, at no time had such rapid progress been made. Revolver in hand, Jesse James patrolled the section and so kept the men down to their work.

Pat did his part. At the same time he kept his good nature, and evidently entertained no fears as to the outcome so far as he was concerned.

"Wad Oi be quarrellin' wid a jay thot wad be afther slapin' as well if he had blowed out me brains as he would if he had trated me to a sup av whisky?" Pat asked himself, when he had a chance to stop and think over the situation.

"Besides, isn't the thrack bein' laid in better toime than iver? And whatever Jesse, the devil, may do wid the railroad while he is bossin' it, he'll be loike to lave it for dacint people to use when he is t'rough wid it. It is me dooty thot Oi'm doin', and the pay and the spree thot it'll buy for me in the end will be sure to come. Thot's all I've to look out for. And as for Jesse James himself, sure and they hang worse gintlemen than him."

"What is that you're saying, Pat?"

It was the voice of Jesse James. Pat jumped as if a rocket had exploded under his feet.

"Oi was sphakin' of family matters, if ye plase," he said.

The bandit king smiled. He had overheard every word uttered, but did not take the trouble to say so.

"The men seem to be working a little slow now. Can't you make them move livelier?"

"It is toired thot they are."

"A whip or spur takes that feeling out of a horse."

Ye might prod thim wid yer guns. But they aren't Oirish, or it is more work they would do."

"I want to get the rails laid so as to connect with the mountain section before morning. No matter about tamping the ties—that can be done later. You are creeping toward the foothills, but it seems to me that the gang at the other end should be in sight by this time. Ah!—there is a light! And it is being waved as a signal. We must know the meaning of that."

"Ye'll be afther goin' to foind out, Oi'm thinkin'?"

Jesse James sent a penetrating glance into the face of the Irishman.

"And while I'm gone what would you and your men be doing?"

"Track-laying, it's-loikely."

"You wouldn't take into your head to set the train hands at liberty?"

"Oi'll admit thot Oi thought of thot. But it would mean me own death, Oi'm thinking."

"Without a chance of failing. But I'm not going to risk it. I will leave my brother in charge of the gang, and take you along with me. Frank can keep

them putting down the rails now as well as you can, and he'll shoot any man that moves too slow to suit him. I will give him the tip, and then you and I will run over and see what that light means."

"Will we roide?"

"We'll walk, Pat. It is but a step, and then we won't show up before we're ready to be seen."

Jesse James informed Frank of his intention, and as Mr. Farnum and Molly were locked in the paycar, and the train hands who still had the breath of life in them, were so securely bound that there was no chance for them to escape without help, Frank could give his whole attention to the workmen on the track.

The laborers, however, were getting uneasy and ill-tempered. They exchanged dark looks as Jesse James and Pat McGraw started over the plain toward the spot where the signal light was still visible.

They could barely speak and understand enough of English to enable them to take orders. Being of several nationalities, they could not understand each other much better than they could the man who was over them as a boss.

But there was a mutual comprehension in the angry and threatening looks which they exchanged. They saw Frank James as he walked along the section of newly-laid track with his Winchester slung over his arm, and his eyes scanning their faces with a scrutiny which seemed to read their thoughts.

Sometimes stupidity takes the place of bravery to a certain extent. Rather, it makes men reckless of the consequences which they are not sharp enough to foresee.

It was so in the present instance. To them the reputation of the James boys meant nothing.

They were in the habit of obeying those in authority, and, as Pat McGraw had before bossed them in temporary absences of Gough, they naturally submitted to his orders when he took the reins of command after the death of the real boss.

But with Frank James it was a different matter altogether. He might look ever so ugly, but he was not boss. He had a gun, but he was only one man, and they were many.

This matter was not discussed by them, nor did they exchange comments on it.

But one of them—a fierce-eyed Italian—shook his fist at Frank James when the latter's back was turned on them for a moment. At the same time the others glanced toward the threatening one, there was a swift exchange of nods, and two or three others shook their fists.

That was enough.

As if an electric current had passed through them, prompting them all to the same act, the whole crew made a dash toward Frank James.

Some held tamping-bars, some seized picks, others swung spikes and even the ponderous wooden ties.

A wild, impetuous rush was made on the bandit, and his first intimation of the danger was the whizzing of a spike past his head, within an inch of his ear.

With lightning quickness he wheeled, and he did not stop to "call" before the Winchester began to "talk."

Then Frank James proved that there was the same kind of invincibility in him that made his brother Jesse merit the title of king of outlaws.

The Winchester sputtered, then was dropped and a revolver appeared in each of the outlaw's hands, and struck in with their tune before the echoes of the other weapon had been tossed back from the mountains.

Not only did he do this, but he at the same time kept retreating in a zigzag fashion, which confused the aim of the laborers in the throwing of spikes.

The men fell like the front rank of a battle line before a discharge of Mausers.

Those who did not fall, fell back with yells of wildest terror, for, of course, there was no one to hold them up to anything like discipline.

Almost half of the workmen fell. Not all were killed, for Frank James made no pretense of precision in the fusillade which he poured at them.

"Back here, you cursed idiots!" he yelled, as they stampeded toward the mountain line.

Jesse James and Pat McGraw had reached the spot where the signal light had been waved just as the fierce battle in which one conquered such overwhelming odds began.

"What in the devil was that?" exclaimed Pat.

Jesse did not reply. He was gazing at the sparkling shots across the plain.

They could hear the reports of revolvers and Winchester mingled with the shouts and cries from the men.

Then they saw the latter as they stampeded toward the hills.

"They're coming this way!" exclaimed Jesse James.

"And ye're brother is after thim loike a divil!"

"They mutinied, and he had to do some killing, and now they've quit the work and are running like a lot of frightened sheep. You can put them back to the work better than I can, for they understand you better and know the meaning of your orders. But I suppose if I let you go back to them you will mutiny the same as they've done, and while Frank is watching them you'll try setting the train hands at liberty. But I'm going to risk it, just the same, and you may gamble heavy that Frank will blow you to pieces a little quicker than I would for the same provocation."

"Ye want me to go back and set the min to worruk?" said Pat.

"Yes, and keep them at it."

"And d'yez expect thot they'll take koindeley to it afther half of thim has been shot dead by your brother?"

"Maybe not, but you will give them the orders, and if they don't obey make them understand that I'll finish up the shooting job that Frank began. Quick about it, for they're all stampeding this way."

Pat McGraw wanted to mutiny then more than he had at any time before. He felt sure that he could not make the men go back to their work, and he hated to try.

He had not minded what the James boys had done so far as much as he did this shooting of the laborers, defenseless as they were.

"It was loike shootin' down so manny shape, at all!" he muttered, half-aloud, as he started back toward the section at a pace that indicated little relish for his part in the programme.

Jesse James observed him with his keen eyes.

"He would mutiny, too, if he dared!" he said.

Then up went his Winchester.

Bang!

Pat uttered a yell, throwing one hand up to his ear, which had been nipped by the bullet.

"Move lively, and mind the orders, or the next will plug your cursed heart!" cried Jesse James.

Pat broke into a run.

"O'ill have to moind, for he's the devil!" he muttered.

CHAPTER VIII.

PAYING THE MEN.

The signal light had been waved by one of the laborers on the mountain section, and it was done by order of Talcott.

Jesse James found him pacing restlessly just within the shadow of the hills, and at a little distance from the spot where the laborers were once more at work laying the rails on that section.

A glance showed the bandit king that the workmen were making rapid progress, and yet it was plain that they could not have been making such headway right along since he had left them, else the two sections would have been brought nearly together ere this.

"What is the meaning of it, Talcott?" was the query of Jesse James.

In a few words the trusted lieutenant of the bandit chief told of the attack of the band of cowboys, and of the brief and bitter fight, in which the foe were defeated.

"You beat them off; but is that the whole of the story?" demanded the chief.

"If it had been I should have joined you with a part of your men, instead of signaling as I did just now."

"Well, what is the rest of it?"

"We killed a good many of the cowboys, though they were rather game in the fight. We captured three."

"Good! And is that all?"

"Three got away. I sent Dutchy and Swanson in pursuit. They overtook and shot two of them, but the third escaped. He will tell of the whole affair, Jesse James, and I leave it to you to reckon on the consequences."

A savage curse broke from the lips of the senior outlaw.

"You have done what you could, Talcott!" he said, a moment later, although his face was black with the furious disappointment which the setback brought him.

"But it looks as if we would have a big war on our hands before we make use of the railroad in the way we planned on. And you have been kept down to it until now with the cowboy business, so that you couldn't report to me?"

"Yes. And even now I didn't dare to leave the spot."

"Why?"

"Because, I have an idea that there may be more of the same kidney here in the mountains. Besides, I wanted to have the laborers make up for the lost time as much as possible, and I found that they worked livelier with me about to glare at them."

"Good! You are a man after my sort, Talcott. You haven't had the fun all to yourself, though."

"You had all you could do—you and your brother?"

"We captured the working crew easy, and there wasn't much fuss with the train that came in. A girl on board, to make matters interesting."

"Eh? A girl, you say?"

"Molly Farnum, daughter of the new division superintendent."

Talcott grew white to the lips, and uttered a sound like a gasp.

"What is it?" demanded the outlaw king.

"The devil's fate seems to be mine!"

"How?"

"How long since Gilbert Farnum became division superintendent of this road, or connected with it in any way?"

"McGraw, a boss of track-layers, says it is a new appointment."

"I didn't dream that the Farnums were in this part of the country."

"But you don't say why the matter disturbs you so much."

"Because Farnum was director in the bank from which I fled as a defaulter! Nor is that all."

"I should say that would be about enough to make it interesting for you," said Jesse James, with a low whistle.

"It isn't the worst, so far as my feelings are concerned, for Molly Farnum was a cousin to Isabel, the girl to whom I was betrothed. They were bosom friends!"

Jesse James looked at the morose countenance of his companion, and then burst into a low laugh.

In that laugh there was mockery, and not mirth, and it brought a flush to relieve the pallor of the younger man.

"To you it may all seem like a joke! But I warn you, Jesse James——"

"You warn me!" echoed the bandit king, and he laughed again, more mockingly than before.

Talcott seemed to find it hard to restrain himself from making a more pronounced manifestation of his feelings.

"You mock my unhappiness!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, from such a cause."

"Because, I suppose, you have forgotten what it is to respect such things as honor and respectable friends, and—love?"

"Humbug, the whole of them."

"You haven't always spoken in that way to me."

"I haven't always spoken to you as I felt."

"You pretended when I first joined your brotherhood—at the time that you saved my life—that you understood my feeling."

"I understand it now."

"Then what do you mean?"

"That it is time for you to stow all of that old gammon. The past is dead. You are a bandit. Your hand has been raised against society, and you are getting to be a mighty good man in your way. You'll make a leader. You're feared now more than any member of my gang excepting my brother and me."

"Perhaps."

"Then drop the old bluff. I'll tell you how to kill the last vestige of the old feeling."

"Tell me, then."

"Come and let me introduce you to Molly Farnum in your new rôle."

"My God!"

"She was rather kind toward me. I said one or two neat things to her, and she paid me a compliment. Think of that, Talcott!"

"You cannot mean it!"

"It is true."

"But if she were to see me as I am now——"

"She would turn her back on you if you sneaked around as if you were ashamed of your new calling. But sail in, and greet her like a man. You are handsome, rather dashing, and she'll like you better than she did when you were playing the part of a virtuous softy with her cousin."

Talcott's eyes flashed with a strange, new light.

"I've a mind to do as you say!" he exclaimed.

"It's the thing to do."

"But her father——"

"If he starts to preach, offer to show him how you can handle your Winchester. If he behaves bump-tious, offer to show him how you can handle your dukes. That'll make him civil, and she'll want to hug you because you've come up like a man of nerve. So much for that. About the danger of being interfered with by another posse brought down on us by the cowboy who escaped, we've got to leave something to luck. Come back with me, and I'll send Frank to boss the gang here."

"All right—I'll go."

Cole Younger and the big Swede, as members of the James boys' brotherhood, were left behind to keep the track-layers hustling.

The other members of the gang accompanied Jesse James and Talcott back to the other section.

They found Frank James with his hands full, but holding the fort with a display of nerve that was bringing the remnant of the laboring gang down to business again.

Pat McGraw was back at his post, and his word had more effect in quelling the mutiny—or, at least, in bringing the men to order—than the fear of being shot.

But Pat was far from being in good humor himself.

The men were tired, and a third of their number had been shot by the outlaw brothers.

Besides, they had not yet seen the promised money.

They had reached the point where they worked as slaves work, because they fear the lash, and not for hope of reward.

But already they could see the other gang of men laying rails to meet them, and, as the way was now smooth, there was fair promise of having the road in shape to run the train on into the mountains by sunrise.

Jesse James called Pat aside, and gave him a roll of money.

"Distribute that in the gang!" he said.

"Good for yez."

"Tell them they may sleep or go to the devil tomorrow—I don't care which!"

CHAPTER IX.

TALCOTT AND MOLLY FARNUM.

"Now, we will see Miss Farnum, Talcott," said Jesse James, as he led the way into the passenger coach where Mr. Farnum and his daughter were imprisoned.

"Introduce me as Mr. Talcott, and see if she recognizes me," returned the other.

He was no longer pale, nor did he otherwise show more than a slight measure of agitation.

He was hardening himself to face the new life which he had chosen, with all of the reckless abandon which belonged to it.

Jesse James was proving to be a grand teacher of the strange art.

Mr. Farnum was pacing the floor of the car.

He had slept for an hour or two, possibly, and that had taken off the edge of drowsiness which comes to a man when he is fatigued, and he could not sleep again.

Molly Farnum had not slept at all.

The killing of the guards had brought to her a terrible shock, of course. Otherwise, the mere robbery of the paycar, and the capture of the road by the James boys would have been to her merely a novel experience with the tingle of adventure in it.

She thought often of the words and behavior of Jesse James.

He had not seemed to be in the least like the man she had always imagined the great bandit to be.

As Jesse and Talcott entered the car, she was at the opposite end of the compartment, near the door which was locked upon the train hands.

Her father, pacing the compartment, was in a position to meet the gaze of the intruders as soon as the door was opened.

He gave Talcott only a slight glance. If the face of the young outlaw looked familiar to him, he did not attach special significance to the fact just then.

"How long, may I ask, do you intend to keep us cooped up here, Mr. James?" he demanded.

"Only a short time longer, I hope, as we are to make a first run into the mountains over the new track."

"What do you mean, sir?"

"We have the two sections close together, and expect to connect them by sunrise."

"Do you mean to say that you have kept the gangs at work all night?"

"I have kept them at work all night."

"But what do you mean to do? You have looted the train of what cash there was on board, and murdered as many of our men as did their duty in trying to protect the property, and I supposed after that you would be satisfied."

"What I have done so far, Mr. Farnum, is only a part of the programme as I had it laid out."

"What is the rest of it?"

"That I decline to answer. But, Mr. Farnum, perhaps you will be glad to met my companion here. Shall I introduce you?"

Farnum gave a quick, keen glance at the face of Talcott.

The glance was not sufficient to penetrate even the thin disguise which Talcott had assumed.

Yet he noticed that the face and expression were quite familiar, and he looked expectant.

"Allow me to present to you one of my most trusted and nervy lieutenants, Mr. Talcott, Mr. Farnum," said Jesse James, with mock ceremony.

"I—I don't think I feel so very highly honored—" began Farnum.

His speech was interrupted by a scream from the lips of Molly, who had approached unobserved.

"Herman Averill!" she cried.

She sprang toward him, white, trembling, half-hesitating, nevertheless.

Her hands were outstretched.

He took them, and his agitation was little less than her own.

"Molly!" he exclaimed.

"What—what is the meaning of this, Herman?"

"Look at me, and you should be able to guess the riddle!"

"You are not a comrade of this—this——?"

"Devil, from Satan's town!" laughed Jesse James.

"You might as well give me the name that comes to your lips, Miss Farnum. I'm not sensitive."

"I am a follower of Jesse James, the king of bandits," said Talcott, while the hands of Molly still rested in his.

"I cannot believe it!"

"She'd rather think you a liar than a bandit!" chipped in Jesse again, with his mocking laugh.

Mr. Farnum found his tongue then.

He recognized in the dark, handsome, somewhat jaunty young outlaw at the side of Jesse James the trusted cashier who had robbed the Eastern bank and defaulted.

The former director of the ruined bank sprang upon Talcott as though he would have torn him limb from limb.

Molly tried to press back her infuriated father.

But the latter thrust her aside, with a muttered oath, and attempted to seize the throat of the fugitive.

"You shall go back with me, and face the penalty of your crime!" snarled the gentleman.

Talcott tried to repulse the attack without a blow.

Molly observed his forbearance. And she realized that it was only in self-defense at last that the young outlaw sent Gilbert Farnum to the ground with a well-directed blow.

Farnum got up clumsily, and sank on to a seat.

Molly, seeing that he was not seriously hurt, turned to Talcott.

"Have you turned your back forever on the upright life that you once led?" she pleaded.

A scornful and bitter smile curled the lips of the young outlaw.

"Will you tell me how I may go back to it?" he asked.

"Return to your former friends—make such reparation as you can—confess everything——"

"And go to prison, and be branded as a criminal, a convict, the rest of my life! A bright prospect!"

"They would be merciful."

"Your father just showed a slight token of the feeling to which I would be treated on a larger scale."

"I would plead in your behalf, and Isabel—your Isabel—would give her very life to save you."

"It would be wasted. The law must not be cheated of its prey. No, Molly, the die is cast. If I am to have another gleam of happiness in this life, it will have to come to me, for I cannot go to it. I am an outlaw, and as such I must spend the rest of my days."

Molly was a beautiful and generous-hearted girl, and the half-scornful smile that curled the lips of Jesse James at the beginning of the interview faded into a different expression.

He touched her on the arm.

She met his piercing eyes, and was once more impressed by their marvelous power.

"You are the sort to make us all wish we were saints," he said. "But it can't be. The hill is too steep for us to climb. But it would be easy for you to come down and be one of us. Where is this Isabel, the girl Talcott here was to have married?"

"She is out here somewhere among the mountains."

"How does that happen?"

"She came in the hope of finding a trace of Mr. Averill—or Talcott, as you call him."

"He has seen her. She was in a new gold camp which we looted some time ago. I tried afterward to see her in his interest, but she had gone, and I couldn't seem to get track of her again."

"I know where she is."

"Well?"

"She is at the terminus of this road, beyond the mountains, and I was going to see her on this trip. I was to span the gap between the completed sections of the track on horseback."

"Good! You won't have to be to so much trouble. This train will run through within three or four hours."

Molly looked at Talcott, to see if the outlaw chief were not speaking in jest.

"It is so—we shall make the run, without a doubt. You see, we have a way of building railroads in swifter time than under the old schedule for such work."

"Then you will see Isabel—and we will all go back——"

"Hardly that, Molly. I may see Isabel. What will come of it remains to be seen."

"Meanwhile, Miss Farnum," smiled Jesse James.

"you will finish your trip on my railroad, under a free pass."

"Your railroad!" she repeated.

"Yes. I control it now. And it will do a little business for me before I let go of the property."

Farnum had by this time recovered from the blow so as to rise to his feet again. He had listened to the talk which had been passing, with evident interest.

When he again took part in it he was in a more reasonable mood, realizing that he could do nothing toward the capture of Talcott then.

Did he but know it, the plan which he had in his brain, by which he hoped soon to set the authorities on the track of the fugitive, was to receive a check from an unexpected quarter.

Molly Farnum, with her woman's wit, spurred by her woman's love, would stand in the way.

Jesse James went out on to the platform just as the sun burst through the haze on the eastern horizon.

As he did so, the shrill whistle of a locomotive split the air!

CHAPTER X.

ANOTHER ATTACK.

"Another train coming—to look up what has become of this one, likely!"

Such was the exclamation of Jesse James, as the sound of the locomotive whistle broke upon the stillness.

He was on the rear platform, and could plainly see the headlight of the coming train.

It was beginning to slow up.

The bandit king opened the door and called out to Talcott:

"Here's business for us, and hurry-up orders!"

Talcott joined him instantly. The door of the car was closed and locked as before.

"We'll get out of sight for the moment. What brings this train at this infernal minute is more than I can figure out, and I don't like the looks of it in any case."

They sprang from the platform and hurried along the length of the train, keeping so close to the cars that they were unlikely to be seen from the engine of the other train.

Jesse James soon attracted the attention of his other men, who were keeping guard over the engine and with an eye on the track-layers.

The fact that the construction train had been moved ahead a few yards at a time, at intervals of an hour or so, to keep pace with the laying of the new track, we have omitted to state.

Therefore Jesse James and Talcott were within a few paces of the track-layers when they reached the head of the train.

A glance showed that the track-layers of the other section had approached to within the length of a few rails of a connection with McGraw's section.

Jesse James turned to Talcott, and the fire of an invincible determination blazed in his eyes.

"I give you leave to shoot or to give orders according to your discretion, in the handling of the crew on that new train. Take all our men, and don't hesitate at anything. I must speak to McGraw, and I'll join you in a moment!" he cried.

"As you say," said Talcott, coolly.

The scanty number of their little band stood awaiting his word.

In an instant he had ordered them to stand by him as he held up the locomotive, which was at that moment slowing up within a few yards of where they stood.

Jesse James reached the side of McGraw by a leap like that of a tiger.

"Throw down those rails and ties, and knock them together with a spike to each. Do you hear me, McGraw?"

"They'll sprid, Mr. James——"

"Not the first time they're run over, and you know it. I don't care a curse what becomes of them in three days. At them, man! I want to use them within ten minutes—do you mind that?"

"Oi mind! Byes, whack down the spikes. Hit them as if they's Oirish. Thin ye can quit worruk for a wake!"

The men caught the spirit of the hurry, and worked with a will.

At the same time Frank James rode up from the other section.

"What train is that?" he demanded of his brother.

"One sent by the devil, I reckon."

"I have been having the rails laid in a rather temporary fashion, for the sake of gaining time, Jesse. Is that all right?"

"Just what I have ordered done here. McGraw!"

"Yis, sur-r!"

"Look out that there is no mutiny, for I'll hold you responsible, and if there is any hitch in my business at this stage I'll blow your head off, if it is the only thing I have time to do before I pass in my own checks."

"Oi'll take care, Mr. James."

"Now, for the new train. We are a small crowd, but there was never a better chance to prove the stuff we're made of. Ha!—Talcott has got the engineer and fireman out of the cab, and their hands up. Now for the rest of the crew!"

Frank and Jesse, with Cole Younger and Jigger Jim, the ugly little half-breed, dashed back toward the newly-arrived train.

The latter was made up of locomotive, tender, a baggage and smoking car. All were old and dingy.

The conductor jumped off. Jesse James saw him

at a distance, and there was not time to get within proper speaking range.

Up went his Winchester.

It was an easy distance for that to make itself heard, and its brief, terrible message was uttered.

The conductor fell.

At this juncture from the rear platform of the smoker a half-score of men leaped, following each other with an impetuosity and discipline that showed them to be there for business.

They were armed to the teeth.

Cole Younger, true to the streak of cowardice which seemed for the occasion to have obtained possession of him, wheeled about and would have run from the spot like a frightened rabbit.

But he actually ran against a revolver held like a bar in the hand of Jesse James.

He half-fell, blood gushing from his nose.

"Back to the fight, or I'll riddle you!"

The terrible threat from the lips of the bandit king was the needed bracer for the fagging will of the outlaw.

He wheeled and joined in the dash which the James boys, with Talcott and the other members of the Banded Brotherhood, made upon the oncoming crowd.

In the dim morning light, with a mist descending from the hills, both faces and garb of the men in the attacking party were indistinct.

But, as usual, it was Jesse James who opened the ball.

Winchester and revolvers, the latter succeeding the former with machine like rapidity, carried a fusillade from this one wonderful man which might well have staggered a company of soldiers had they been called upon to face it.

Jesse James was in the lead.

It was so that he always inspired his comrades with a mad sort of courage that seemed to be actually indifferent to a rain of bullets.

Several of the foremost of the attacking party went down before half the distance separating them had been spanned.

The shots began to come back.

But a haze of smoke settled between them, and already the strangers were stricken with the beginning of panic.

"Into them—through them!" rang the tones of Jesse James.

He set the example by a forward lunge that sent him toward the attacking crowd like a projectile.

The others followed, spread out like a fan, firing, yelling, joining in a scoffing chorus of laughter started by the leader.

The parties came together, with weapons discharged, muzzle to muzzle, and the blaze of them hot in each others' faces.

A fight like that cannot last long.

One of the contending parties suddenly broke away, and fled, as wildly and impetuously as it had moved in the attack.

"Don't let a devil of them go back to tell the story!"

Such was the grim command of Jesse James.

There was a smear of blood across his left cheek, and his neck was blackened with powder. These marks but added to the natural fierceness of aspect which had grown out of one of the wildest careers that a man ever led.

The flying men, now only three in number, and every one wounded, sped down the length of the train and attempted to dodge from sight around the rear end of it.

The firing had for the moment ceased, the revolvers of the outlaws being emptied. But Jesse and Frank James reloaded as they ran.

As the enemy reached the end of the train and ran past it, they made a leap for the platform.

Their purpose was clear to the quick mind of Jesse James.

They realized that escape by direct flight would be impossible. They thought that by getting into the car they could barricade themselves and get some shots at the outlaws through the windows without being themselves so much exposed.

It was a good scheme if they could only have made it work.

But the one with whom they had to cope was as quick and unerring of brain as he was of hand. It takes these qualities combined to make the leader of that kind.

Jesse James did not stop them to try to make his companions understand the situation. He was not the man to stand and give orders and watch them executed by somebody else, when he could make them surer with his own hand.

With the speed of a trained runner the outlaw king crossed the short intervening distance, reached the rail, seized it, leaped upon the platform and flung himself against the door, just as the fugitives tried to close it in his face.

For a single passionate moment, he maintained a single-handed struggle against the three men on the other side.

Then the door suddenly swung back, and the bandit king was precipitated into the car.

The door slammed shut. Jesse James and his three desperate foes were shut in together!

CHAPTER XI.

A TERRIBLE FIGHT.

Jesse James was as ready for the situation in which he found himself as he was for everything else.

He had a revolver in hand when he plunged into

the car. In pushing with so much force against the door he was thrown in by the great force of his own momentum.

But he was not confused by it so much as were his foes. One of the latter he fell against with his full weight.

Bang!—from the revolver, and the foe went down without a groan.

The other two would have thrown themselves on to the outlaw chief, and they were so well aware of the character of the man with whom they had to cope that they knew their only hope of winning was in getting in the first shots or cuts.

But their weapons were empty, and they could not load with the marvelous facility which characterized the loading of the James Boys while in action.

They used knives. These they attempted to jab into the outlaw at the same instant that he sent the shot into the third one of their number.

It was at too close quarters for him to do any more shooting then. He did not try.

Even before he could pull a knife the two of them were plunging at him like beasts of prey.

One of the outlaw's clinched hands caught an assailant under the chin. The man was almost lifted off his feet by the terrible force of the blow.

The other made a sweep with his knife on a line with Jesse James' neck.

The slash was aimed well enough. But an upward swing of the outlaw's arm struck the assailant's wrist, and the knife was snapped out of his grasp with spiteful force.

It flew up and stuck, and quivered, in the top of the car.

Had this remaining assailant of Jesse James been of the ordinary sort, this would have ended the fight. But he was a man of extraordinary muscular powers, with some skill as a wrestler and pugilist besides.

So the bandit king found himself suddenly locked in an embrace like that of a grizzly bear.

They swayed to and fro in a terrible struggle. It became a matter of muscle and skill matched against the same qualities, and backed, on the one hand, by a realization that death would come with defeat, and on the other by the resolve that death were better than defeat in any case.

In that kind of a fight maneuvers and contortions are drawn out which would seem otherwise to have been impossible to the powers of human combatants.

At the same time, although the struggling men were for the moment unconscious of the fact, there was a desperate attempt on the part of those on the outside of the car to obtain admittance.

The door had a snap lock, and the crew of men who had occupied it had that lock set so as to fasten whenever the door was shut tight. Thus, had the

men whom Jesse James followed into the car succeeded in getting the door fairly closed against him, they would have been temporarily secure.

So Frank James and the other members of the band who had followed close at the heels of Jesse were at the door trying to open it while the terrible struggle was going on inside the car.

The two men swayed to and fro, their breathing becoming labored from the desperate character of the strain which was upon them.

There was no reserving of powers for a final effort on the part of either. Each put forth his best at the start, and it was a question as to which had the greater strength and ability to exercise it, from the beginning.

Could there have been witnesses to that struggle—could there have been an arena for the exhibition, surrounded by critical spectators—it would have been something to have found a place among the records of great gladiatorial contests.

But only the men themselves knew of the intensity of the contest. To only one would come the glory of it—and even that glory was to be buried in the strangely taciturn silence of the victor.

In their evolutions, the combatants ranged from one end of the car to the other. This brought them at last up against the door, on the outer side of which the other outlaws were clamoring and hammering for admittance.

As anybody knows, the door of an ordinary passenger car is stanchly built. Without hatchets or similar implements it would be no easy matter to batter down the door.

The struggle became a question, on the part of Jesse James, of the possibility of unlocking the arms of his assailant from their bearlike embrace.

To this end he finally bent all his energy.

He got his antagonist against the door, and there suddenly succeeded in planting his knee in the man's wind.

That did the work. The assailant relaxed the terrible tension of his arms. In an instant Jesse James broke away.

Then came a fierce blow from the bandit's fist, hitting the other in the mouth. Then the bandit's left hand sought his enemy's throat, found it, closed on it, pressed the head of the foe back against the door and made the eyes bulge like those of a drowning rat.

The fight belonged to the outlaw king then, and both of them knew it.

He found a knife, there was the sound of steel cutting flesh, and the gamey foe sank in a limp and bleeding heap at the feet of Jesse James.

In that brief space of time he had overcome, single-handed, and at a disadvantage, three as powerful and nerry men as he had ever met in his whole career.

Then, for the first time, he became aware of the sounds of clamor on the outside of the door.

He flung it open.

In rushed Frank James, Cole Younger, Jigger Jim and Talcott.

A glance around the car told the story of the terrible fight, in which their leader had won.

Two of the strangers were dead. But one—the one who had been felled only by the terrific blow from the fist of Jesse James—was alive, and in the act of rising to a sitting posture.

Cole Younger put a revolver at the survivor's ear, and would have pulled the trigger; but the stern tones of Jesse James uttered the command:

"Hold!—I want the man to talk!"

Talcott was making a swift survey of the interior of the car, to see if it contained any kind of cargo besides the crew of men who made such a plucky attempt to defeat the James boys and their Banded Brotherhood.

Jesse James, although still breathing hard and a little pale from the effects of the desperate fight for life which he had waged, stepped lightly to the side of the man sitting on the floor of the car.

His jaw was quivering with the pain of the fearful blow which it had received:

"Look here, man!"

He looked up into the dark, fierce countenance of the bandit king.

"You—you won against them all!" he gasped.

"You can see for yourself."

"The fiends must back you in every fight!"

"So they do. But we aren't here to discuss that. Maybe you don't care whether you live or not?"

"Not for myself so much. But a man has other reasons for hating to let go, sometimes."

"I'll give you a show, if you'll make good use of it."

"I've heard it said that Jesse James never spares an enemy."

"He does when he can make use of him."

"Then make use of me, for I want to live."

"I want to know how it happens that this train, with a crew of men ready for a fight, antes up here at this infernal time?"

"We heard that you and your crowd were plotting mischief against the road, and that the pay-train would probably be held up."

"How did you find it out?"

"A cowboy came in with the warning a few hours after the pay-train passed, last night."

"Where did he come from?"

"In a beeline from the mountains. There was a big crowd of them going to attack you in the hills. But they knew you were slippery, and when they

heard that the pay-train was due to come out yesterday, they sent this courier to give us warning at the last station on this side."

"Well, who are you?"

"A decent man, who has worked for small pay on a ranch for more than a year. That big fellow yonder, that you seem to have worsted in the fight, was the leader of this expedition. He has boasted that he would prove that Jesse James would go down as quick as any man if he only found that he was bucking against somebody that wouldn't scare."

The stern lips of the bandit king curled slightly. But he made no other comment on the speech. The way the fight had resulted was comment enough.

"How many were there of you in all?" he asked.

"Fifteen, counting the train hands. But your men held them up at the start. Oh, we were beaten, and that dead easy, it seems."

"So it seems!" echoed the outlaw.

CHAPTER XII.

BEGINNING A FEARFUL RACE.

Jesse James might not have carried his questioning further had he not caught a peculiar intonation in the man's voice when he made the last seemingly hopeless speech.

That tone seemed to have a note of exultation in it.

Before the man could breathe again the muzzle of a revolver was pressed against his ear.

A moan of mortal terror escaped his lips.

Yet he dared not stir. He thought that Jesse James had obtained from him all the points of information he sought, and that now he was about to end the life which was of no further use to him.

"Man," spoke the outlaw, "what is your name?"

"Dave Baxter. And I never had anything to do against you or your crowd before, sure as I'm a living sinner."

"Nobody said you had. You are keeping something back. I give you ten seconds to begin telling it, and I'll guess at the time!"

"I—I'll tell the little I know!" sputtered Dave Baxter, breathlessly.

"Be quick about it."

"When the pay and construction train didn't return when it was due last night, a courier was sent back through the mountains to warn the people

there. You know there aren't many good hiding-places among those hills."

"I know. Is that all?"

"That is all."

"I'll let you live till I find out that you have lied to me or kept something back—even a word—back from me. Then you go the way of all liars!"

Jesse James made a sign to Jigger Jim to make the man secure. Then he spoke to Talcott.

"What have you done with the crew belonging to this train?"

"Those that had the wit to surrender instead of being shot are bound in good shape and locked in a car."

"Good."

Jesse James drew his brother Frank aside so that Baxter might not hear the orders given, and said:

"I will put you and Cole Younger in charge of this train. You will ride in the cab with the engineer, and fireman, and if they don't keep down to their work you will know what to do."

"I reckon so. So you're going to move this train at the same time that you do the other?"

"It must follow close, and I'm going to let 'em both out for all they're worth."

"How about the halt up among the hills?"

"It has got to be made."

"And the cargo taken on?"

"Yes."

"How about this warning that seems to have been sent ahead?"

"Oh, somebody has been spying. Curse it all!—there is always somebody spying!"

"But we will have close work getting past the station beyond the hills."

"It must be done."

"With both trains?"

"With both trains."

"We need only one."

"If this was left it would give them something to follow us with. As it is, this can follow our other train and cover us from the rear."

"They'll get a locomotive and car and give chase just the same."

The lips of Jesse James closed with grim resolve.

"Then wreck this one, and block the track!"

Frank James saw the wisdom of his brother's plan.

"Queer I didn't think of that before," he said.

Morning had dawned.

It had been an eventful night, and the James boys and Talcott realized that there promised to be a most eventful day ahead of them.

From the cowboy attack among the hills, and this organized attempt to capture them before they should have time to get away with the first train which they had captured, it was plain that they had been spied upon for some time.

A scheme to catch them redhanded in the midst of one of their bold undertakings had been formed.

To those in charge of this plan, information had been furnished. But this was only of a meagre character, and not entirely correct as to detail.

It was evidently suspected that the James boys were working in that vicinity, and that they had some plot under way. But there had not been time to sufficiently warn those in charge of the construction of the new railway.

For that matter, it had been the purpose of those in charge of the undertaking against them to leave the James boys free to show their hand in whatever game they might have on foot.

But it was little suspected that the outlaws had an undertaking in hand whose boldness involved the capture of a railroad under construction, and the making use of the same for their own purposes.

On one point the enemies of the outlaws had been correctly informed.

This was concerning the numbers of the Banded Brotherhood.

That Jesse and Frank James were backed by only a small number of men was a fact which had been banked on quite heavily in the plan to capture or annihilate them.

How this over-confidence resulted in the attacks made upon them, has already been shown.

The first train of which they had taken possession was the one made up entirely of construction cars on the mountain end of the route.

The locomotive used on that train was an old one, and not adapted to fast running. The cars were mostly of the short, tilting kind known as "dump cars."

This train, after it was held up, had been run on to a short spur-track among the hills. The fire under the locomotive boiler was drawn, the trucks blocked with heavy timbers, and the outfit otherwise rendered in such condition that many hours of labor would be required before it could be made use of.

Having briefly gone over the conditions with his brother and Talcott, Jesse James went out to look out for the final move in the game.

He found McGraw driving the last spike necessary to make the connection of the sections with his own hand.

"All roight, Jesse James!" he exclaimed, as the bandit king approached. "Ye can run your trains up into the mountains a-hootin, if it plases ye!"

"What do you intend to do—you and your laborers?"

"It would suit us av ye would take us on your train to the town on the other side av the hills, and lave us to our own destruction. It is loikely thot the railroad may nade us again whin you get through wid it, and are ready to sill out."

"I will lock you all into a car and take you along. Run your men in right here, and no lost time about it. Steam is up, and we will be on the whirl within five minutes."

Pat McGraw was quick to make the men understand that their labors were over for the present, and that they might go into the nearest car and sleep their fill after the protracted period of work.

Jesse James personally made sure that the car was made secure after the men were inside of it.

Within the five-minute limit named by him the construction train was under headway, moving toward the hills.

The two gangs of workmen were locked into one car.

Jesse James entered the cab of the leading locomotive, and saw that the engineer got the best possible speed out of the engine.

The outlaw chief had run a locomotive himself on one or two occasions, and could have dispensed with the services of the driver, if necessary. But it best suited his present purposes to be free from the trouble and responsibility of running the engine.

Back in the pay-car was Talcott, in company with Molly Farnum and her father.

The other members of the Banded Brotherhood were distributed through the two trains in such a manner as to guard all parts of them. Frank James and Cole Younger, as suggested by Jesse, rode in the cab of the second locomotive.

It was so that the captured trains, booming over the railroad which, for the time being, was owned by the outlaw king and his Banded Brotherhood, wound

their way up among the hills with a crash and a roar that awakened new echoes.

At the most lonely point amid the mountain spur the foremost train was pulled up short, with a screaming of brakes and grinding of trucks.

With a hurry born of discipline, and the exactness of the orders previously given, a half-dozen men sprang off and dashed out into a hidden recess at one side, and above the track.

In a quarter-of-an-hour a heavy wagon, drawn by two horses and the same number of mules, rumbled forth from the narrow pass among the rocks.

It was accompanied by Jesse James' men. It was laden with treasure in boxes and sacks. This was hustled on to one of the cars. Then Jesse James gave the order to the engine-driver:

"Now, push the steam to her! Stop for nothing!"

CHAPTER XIII.

CONCLUSION.

Just a word more of explanation, and then we may proceed with the final and most critical incident of this episode in the career of the James boys.

For several years Jesse James had made use of a hidden place among those hills as a cache for treasure, which he and his men had captured in various raids for miles around.

The hiding-place was a safe one until the railroad was laid out along a course very close to it.

From the hour that the road was projected Jesse James felt increasing concern for the safety of his treasure.

He must manage in some manner to transport it to a new place of hiding.

The nearest point which he considered safe was beyond the first station west of the hills.

There was a lonely stretch of country, where it would be possible to transport the treasure with mules if it could only be carried more quickly past the station referred to.

It was on this account that he planned to capture the railroad before trains should begin to run regularly, and make use of a train for transporting the valuables to the point whence it would be possible to make use of the slower means for the final stage of the shift.

Now the plan was being carried into execution.

But, unsuspected by him, as we have said, he had

been spied on, and it had been discovered that he had some scheme on foot. But the character of that plan had not been discovered.

On boomed the trains, the leading one now laden with a precious store.

Once through the hills there was a stretch of downgrade.

Here the speed was increased to the point of recklessness.

"We'll jump the track—that's what we'll do!" growled the engine-driver.

"I reckon not," said Jesse James.

"It is new, remember, and there's a chance of a flaw somewhere."

"Let her go!"

That stopped the discussion. An engine-driver always risks his life more or less, and he wasn't scared. Indeed, he began to admire the invincible man at his side, to whom death seemed to be a sport.

Suddenly the engineer, whose eyes never left the track ahead, turned his eyes toward the stern face of the outlaw chief.

"There's a train ahead of us!"

"Are you sure?"

"Dead sure."

"Going which way?"

"It is coming toward us."

"They think to drive me back into the hills, and to hold me there as in a trap."

"Well, I suppose we'll have to reverse?"

The engine-driver began to shift the lever.

The hand of Jesse James covered his, gripping it tight.

"No!—straight ahead, if it takes us to hades!" he gritted.

"You—you don't mean that you will smash into that train, head-on?"

"As they choose about that."

"You mean that you will force them to turn back or be responsible for the collision?"

"Just that!"

"My God!—if they don't catch on to the trick in time——"

"We'll have plenty of company as we sail into kingdom come—that is all!"

"That's where we're bound, all right!" said the engineer.

The train they were rushing to meet loomed more and more plainly into sight.

"Give 'em the danger-screech!" ordered Jesse James.

The air quivered with the sound, which is not always audible to those who are in the cab of a locomotive.

They could see a white spurt of steam from the whistle of the advancing train. But the roar of their own drowned the sound of it.

Nearer and nearer the two trains drew to each other.

It would soon be too late to avert the collision.

"Can it be that that fool is going to run into us?" snarled the engine-driver.

The fireman was white as a sheet.

"Shall we jump as we strike?" he asked.

"No."

"It is death!"

"It is that in either case, if they don't—but they're slowing up! I reckoned they'd weaken!"

It was so.

The train into which they seemed to be running with deadly certainty was pulling up as short as air-brakes would accomplish the feat.

They were at a standstill by the time Jesse James' train was within five hundred yards of them.

The next instant they began to move backward.

Before they were under full speed in that direction, however, the pursuing train was so close that the pilots of the two engines almost touched.

It was a terrible moment, for the hand of Jesse James, still gripping that of the engine-driver, would not let the latter slacken the pace an iota.

"Slide into them if they slow up by a hair!" said Jesse James into the ear of the grim man at his side.

But the driver of the other engine realized by this time that there was only one thing for him to do, and that was to keep out of the way.

In the pay-car there were three anxious persons, and all had their heads out of windows watching the terrible race.

Talcott comprehended the situation, and well did he know that Jesse James would not stop for any life on that train or any other.

Molly Farnum was pale, but strangely resolute.

"That devil cares not how many lives he sacrifices!" exclaimed her father.

To this she made no answer. She was at the side of Talcott, and, unconsciously, perhaps, her hand found his, and was tightly clasped.

"This is a dreadful life!" she murmured.

"But it is not a tame one, and I am in it to stay!"

came back in the low tones of the man at her side.

She looked into his face. She was strangely thrilled by the look that met hers.

Not a word was spoken then, but the clasp of their hands grew closer.

When they saw that the other train had turned back, and that the imminence of death was at least averted, the lips of the young and handsome outlaw touched the soft cheek so close to his own.

Then she met his gaze—hers fell—her cheeks flushed with a beauty which had never appeared in them before—and the pledge of a love which could not die passed mutely between them.

Such was the little life-drama which passed, or, rather, began—while the dreadful race over the rails went on.

Soon they knew that they were approaching the station.

"What now?" demanded the engineer at the side of Jesse James.

"Straight on!"

"The other train may try to signal for the switch!"

"If they dare to fly on to one at this pace, we can stand it."

"That's so. But they're creeping away from us a bit. The grade is steeper there. I believe they'll try for the switch!"

This proved to be the fact.

But, in risking it, they had to take something more than their own success in getting over the frogs safely into account.

If they allowed the James boys' train to follow them they would be just as surely smashed as though they had allowed the collision to occur on the open track.

By signaling the switchman was made to understand enough of the situation to do the right thing, as far as he was able.

Fortunately, he knew his business.

The switch was turned, the leading train was jerked on to the side track, and the moment it cleared the switch was turned back again.

Just in time.

The James boys' trains, together, swept on over the straight track, while the switchman clung to the lever with straining arms and bulging eyes, for he did not have time to lock the switch.

It was over. In a moment they flashed past the station, and swept on with a roar out on to the stretch of lonely plain, to be succeeded by the rugged mountains beyond.

"Keep her down to it!" breathed Jesse James.

"It was a big thing, though!" muttered the engine-driver. "And, Jesse James, from this hour I'll say you are the nerviest man living. It is enough to make me half-wish that I belonged to your gang myself."

"I'm in want of good men; but I'm death to spies, so have a care!"

If any pursuit was attempted then, the James boys had too good a lead to be troubled by it.

The point which they wished to reach was arrived at two hours later, only a few small stations being on the way.

The work of unloading the treasure and shifting it away toward the new and distant cache by means of horses, which were in waiting, was successfully accomplished. And it would be many a day, if ever, before the new hiding-place would be in danger.

All hint as to the object of the trip was carefully guarded from the occupants of the two trains who were not in the confidence of Jesse James.

Both trains were sent back to the station which they passed with such furious haste, and where they had such a narrow escape.

Molly Farnum went with her father. But a month later she met Talcott, the latter in disguise, and the pair were united in marriage.

Then the James boys and their Banded Brotherhood temporarily disbanded, separating, and so confused and defeated all attempt to avenge this, one of their boldest and most sanguinary feats.

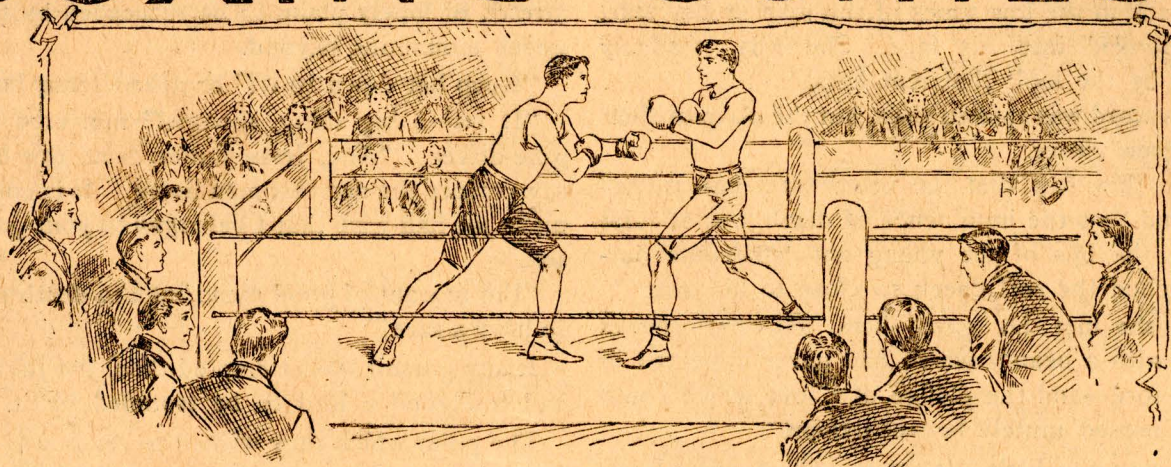
His brief ownership of a railroad furnished a unique episode in the career of Jesse James, the bandit king.

THE END.

Next week's issue (No. 47) will contain "Jesse James Foiled; or, The Pinkerton's Best Plan." Did you ever hear of Jesse James' pursuit of a treasure box, and how he burnt the town of Wind Hollow to secure it? The Pinkertons laid their best plan to catch him on that occasion. That they failed was only due to the splendid nerve and dash of the great outlaw. Look out for it next week, boys.

LOOK ON PAGE 30 FOR ANNOUNCEMENT OF THIS CONTEST.

BOXING CONTEST



Time! First Round's over in this contest. I tell you, boys, it was a hot one. The letters have come in so quick that they kept the editor blocking and ducking to keep from being swamped in the whirlwind of envelopes. You're doing great work, boys. Keep it up, and we'll break all records.

Now, get ready to read some rattling good stories.

Clang!—the bell has rung and the contest is on again.

A Close Bout.

(By A. Le Roy, Pennsylvania.)

We had chosen a member by the name of Bob Butchko, and one unknown, Frederick Peters, who were to go the limit of eight rounds, one weighing 140 pounds and the other 136, a pretty good match. The first round was a little bit of clever footwork by both, but was finished in the last by a left hook, which put Peterson to the floor. Getting up, he rushed Bob to the ropes. Bob side-stepped in time to avoid an uppercut, and returned with a left which caught Charlie on the nose and drew blood first time.

Charlie made a swing, which would have landed a bad one, but it was blocked by Bob, who sent in a straight left for Charlie's bread basket.

This was blocked, and Charlie, seeing an opening, let out a good one, which caught Bob on the solar plexus and made him see stars.

Bob looked as if he was getting a little groggy, but soon came to. He started in a little slow, but he guarded well, and seeing no opening, landed an over-hand blow which put Charlie to the floor. Time was very nearly up for Charlie.

Bob rushed him to the corner. Charlie clinched. Breaking, Charlie gave him a half-ram jolt in the short ribs, which made him a little sick for a while. Bob, bracing up, thought of a clever side-step he learned a while before.

Rushing at his opponent, he tried a left for the ear, throwing himself on the side of Peterson at the same time, landed his right over his opponent's heart, which made him fall like a rock, just as the bell rang.

Getting up good and weak for a start, he sparred a little for wind, guarding well at the same time and watching for a chance to get in a knockout blow.

Bracing up, he saw an opening.

With all the force he had he tried an uppercut. He lost his balance, missed and fell into Bob's arms, at the same time receiving a left in the jaw which sent him reeling to the floor, face and hands covered with blood.

This knocked him out.

Bob received a box of cigars from the club as the winner, while Peterson never looked for another bout with Bob, but joined us and is now a member of our Tigers' Club, and doing well.

Fishing and Fighting.

(By Roy Stevens, Me.)

One day when Joe Brooks was fishing in a little pond back of a mill a boy came along and threw some rocks into the pond to scare away the fish. He was an enemy of Joe's.

Joe did not say anything the first two or three rocks. But when the boy kept on throwing them he said:

"Will you please stop?"

"No, I won't," said the other.

"Then we will see whether you will or not."

So Joe set his pole and went up the bank and said:

"What did you mean by throwing stones into the pond where I was fishing?"

"I mean to scare away the fish so you could not catch any," said the other, for he felt sure he could put Joe out in a very few minutes, for he had done it before. Joe had been taking lessons for two weeks.

"Well," said Joe, "my friend up here has a set of boxing gloves. We will go up there and put them on and see who is the best man."

They started for the barn, where they found five or

six boys boxing. When they got through Joe put one pair on and he the other pair, and they went at it.

After they had been boxing for five or ten minutes Joe gave him an upper-cut and down he went. When he got up he said he had enough.

While they had been boxing a friend of Jim's—which was the name of the boy Joe had whipped—came into the barn.

"You can't do that to me," he said to Joe.

"Put them on and see," said Joe.

So they put them on and went to boxing. They had boxed two or three minutes when Joe gave him one in the jaw, and he had enough.

They took off their gloves and shook hands, and were good friends after that.

The Shop Boxing Contest.

(By Joel Leslie, Ohio.)

I have been reading Jesse James stories and think they are good stories. I will now write my story, so here I go:

It was a cold day in winter. The wind was blowing fiercely, and there were nine or ten boys in the shop having a jolly time when a boy by the name of James said:

"I will go anybody a game of boxing."

One boy by the name of Tom said:

"I will go you a game."

So they put on the gloves and started the game. The first thing James did was to give Tom an uppercut which sent him on the floor, then the others gave three cheers for James.

Tom got up and started to box when a boy who had a watch yelled time, and they both stopped at once.

The next round Tom knocked James five or six feet away, and he lay still for five minutes and then he was madder than ever, and said he did not want to box any more that day, but he would some other day. Tom said he did not know he could fight so well, and all the boys said that that was the best fight they had seen for a long time.

They each gave Tom ten cents, and James five cents.

Tom said he was getting rich, and then they all said it was getting late and they went home.

A Lively Contest.

(By H. Jorgensen, Iowa.)

Round One.

Both men spar lightly for opening. Farmer makes right-hand feint for neck and lands a quick left jab on Steward's wind. Both men exchange rapid body blows.

Farmer leads with left for Steward's neck. Steward parries with ease, and sends in a stinging right on Farmer's neck, and left on nose. Round ends with first blood for Steward.

Round Two.

Opens with both men in good shape and out for blood.

Steward lands left on Farmer's heart, Farmer lands right on Steward's wind, men clinch, break and Farmer

lands stiff uppercut on Steward's jaw, which floors him. Steward gets up feeling groggy.

Gong sounds and round closes with a lively mix-up.

Round Three.

Men spar for opening. Farmer leads a left for neck. Steward ducks and sends in a stiff right on Farmer's wind. Men clinch, break, and both deliver a number of good body blows.

Round closes with both men on their feet.

Round Four.

Steward forces fighting. Farmer lowers head, which draws an uppercut from Steward. He guards and lands a rain of blows on Steward's body and face.

Men clinch, break, and Steward delivers a stiff left on Farmer's jaw.

Farmer falls on his knees, gets up and receives a bad left on wind, which floors him; the gong saves Farmer.

Round Five.

Round opens with Farmer nearly out. Farmer leads left for wind and receives a stiff right on eye and left on chin. He staggers and fights for wind. Steward leads for face and misses.

Men clinch, break and exchange blows for a few seconds. Farmer still weak.

Steward follows him up and lands a stiff right on wind, and left on jaw, which floors Farmer.

Farmer is counted out, amid a deafening uproar of applause.

A Laughable Contest.

(By Harry Lowet, O. T.)

"Right this way, boys, to see the big boxing match between Kid Evans and Fred Kellie. It's just begun."

Round One.

Time. The two come together, they shake hands and the fight begins.

Stepping back a few paces, Kellie made a rush. Evans ducked his head and landed a blow on the ribs which made Kellie grunt. He raised up and then began hitting right and left. He reached over and hit Evans a jolt over the left eye, which made Evans stagger.

Then Evans struck out his right hand and caught Kellie under the chin and knocked him down.

"Time!" called out the timekeeper.

Everyone roared with laughter when Kellie began to pick himself up. They were rubbed down when time was called again. They were both to their feet. Evans backed Kellie to the ropes and hit him in the mouth. Then he ran to the center of the ring, and Kellie was ducking and dodging. He thought that Evans was standing ready to hit him. Everybody was laughing, and he happened to see that he was making a fool of himself.

He made a rush at Evans with a scowl on his face.

Evans stopped, squared himself and waited for him. Kellie struck a blow at Evans and Evans threw up his guard, knocked off his blow and let one come square from his shoulder and hit Kellie on the jaw.

The fight was over. Kellie thought he had an easy thing when he saw Kid Evans, but he found out later.

EXCITING ADVENTURES.

Keep your eyes open for this page each week, boys.

You will always find here some thrilling story—perhaps a hairbreadth escape by sea, or a dare-devil adventure on land.

They are from the pens of the best writers of exciting stories in the world—veteran hunters, Indian-fighters and border men, scouts, soldiers and sailors—men whose lives have been spent in facing danger of all sorts in all parts of the world.

They have written a collection of the finest stories that have ever been told. They knew how to do it, for they are thoroughly familiar with the scenes they write about.

Look out for them, boys; they are a splendid lot of thrilling tales.

If you admire a plucky and clever boy, read the first of these stories. It tells of a brave fight against Apaches by a New Mexican boy, and the wild ride he took to rescue his friends.

THE DEFENDER OF ARACENA.

By WILLIAM MURRAY GRAYDON.

Xavier Brito was a little New Mexican, who lived—not in these times, but away back in 1845, when New Mexico did not belong to the United States at all.

He was a descendant of those hardy Spanish settlers, who long ago wrested the land from the Pueblos, and now lived on friendly terms with their one-time enemies.

But, though the Pueblos had been pacified many years before, the Apaches, the Utes, and the Comanches were still deadly enemies to the new settlers, and year after year scattered villages were destroyed, shepherds murdered and their flocks driven off.

Xavier was only sixteen, tall for his age, with sleek, black hair and a rich olive complexion. He was a brave lad, fond of all sport, and skillful with the flintlock, the riata and the spear. His father, Jose Brito, lived in the little walled town of Aracena, which sheltered only three or four dozen families, and these mostly at night, for in the daytime they went out to hunt or to plow or to tend to their flocks.

For a time the inhabitants of Aracena had dwelt in peace—it was nearly two months since the last attack from their fierce neighbors, and every one was hoping that such rare good fortune would continue, when early one morning a footsore, wounded refugee came to the town gate and demanded admittance.

His tale was a pitiful one. He belonged to the town of Pulco, some ten miles to the westward, nearer the banks of the Gila River, and the preceding night it had been attacked by the Apaches, half the people slain, and many carried off by their cruel captors.

He alone escaped, and now he wanted the men of Aracena to go in search of the savages and avenge the death of their neighbors.

His tale roused the hearers to wrath. The men of Aracena were a brave and chivalrous people, and in haste they armed, mounted and rode away to the westward.

Xavier begged hard to be allowed to accompany his father, but Jose Brito was inexorable.

"No," he said, sternly, "you must stay to take care of the old men and the women and the children. Else there will be no defenders left at home."

This was a bit of pleasantry on Jose Brito's part, for he knew of no source whence danger could come, but Xavier took it in earnest, and when the men had ridden gayly away, he strutted up and down, saying proudly to himself:

"Yes, I'll stay; I'm to defend the town."

First he brought some water for his mother, and some wood to light her oven, and then he made a visit to the big watch towers which overlooked the town walls, to make sure that the guns were loaded and everything ready for defense.

This grew monotonous, after a while, so he took his bow and arrows and went out to the timber that bordered the plain, hoping to find something to try his skill upon.

But all he could see was a long-eared rabbit, and twanging his bow he sent a shaft right through the little creature.

He was crawling about in the long grass, looking for his game, when, chancing to glance down the long sloping ridge, he saw a spectacle that terrified him. A party of mounted Apaches, riding swiftly over the plain less than a mile away. At first, Xavier could scarce believe his eyes, for the Indians were coming directly from the east, but a closer scrutiny proved he was right. They had made a wide circuit, after leaving Pulco, instead of retreating homeward, and now were coming to attack Aracena.

The lad's paralyzing fear soon passed away, and, as fast as his legs could carry him, he ran back to the town.

"The Apaches, the Apaches!" he cried, loudly; "they are coming, they will soon be here."

What a terrible commotion there was! Women shrieking and wringing their hands, the old men seeking places where they might hide—no one giving a thought

to defense. Yes, there was one. Xavier quickly closed the heavy gate.

"Help me here," he cried; "roll those stones against it, Pedro! drop the bars into their sockets, Manuel! Now, then, to the walls! Get ready your spears, your bows, your muskets; we may hold out until the men return, Father told me to defend the town, and I'm going to do it."

Brave Xavier! His example shamed the cowards, put sudden courage into the hearts of the despairing, and all flocked to the watch-towers, armed with everything they could lay their hands on. Even the women came, ready to take their husband's places.

Soon the Apaches came dashing over the ridge and galloped up to the walls with fierce yells, greatly surprised to find the gates closed and their entry disputed.

Baffled and angered, they withdrew for a time, but it was soon plain that they had no intention of abandoning the attack, for presently they picketed their horses before the walls and swarmed up to the gates, shooting arrows, hurling spears and yelling like a troop of demons.

One of the foremost was picked off with Xavier's own flintlock, and taking courage at this, the old men and the women cast a shower of spears that did much damage among the enemy, and they again withdrew from the assault.

But Xavier knew well that the worst was yet to come, and very soon his fears were verified, for a dozen or more of the bravest Apaches advanced to the wall bearing great beams on their shoulders, taken from a ruined building just outside the town. A rough scaffold was soon constructed, and in spite of the bullets and spears that thinned out their ranks, one by one, they clambered to the top of the wall.

The besieged broke into loud wailings and lamentations, losing all hope, but Xavier was not yet at the end of his resources. The people were crowded into the two towers that stood on each side of the gates.

One of these was larger and more solidly built than the other, and there Xavier concentrated his forces in safety just as several of the Apaches dropped from the wall into the town and tore away the fastenings of the gates.

Xavier watched them with gnashing teeth. If only he had a force sufficient to sally out and attack them.

But he could do nothing, of course, except to hurl spears and shoot arrows, and this only served the more to enrage the Apaches, as the great gates were torn open and they swarmed with piercing yells into the town.

They soon discovered that not a victim was within reach, as they ransacked the houses, and in a short time they were swarming about the watch tower. Here they could do little, for Xavier had hauled up the ladder which gave access to the tower by the little window far up the side, and the lower portion was of solid adobe strongly cemented.

"Don't be afraid," whispered Xavier, cheerily, "but shoot, pour down your weapons on the foe, and he gave them an example by training his flintlock on a big warrior beneath him, dropping him like a log.

The Apaches replied with a cloud of arrows that wounded two of the besieged—not dangerously, however—and then the inmates of the tower replied so vigor-

ously that the foe dodged under cover in utter consternation.

Thus a couple of hours passed, with occasional fruitless rushes on the part of the Indians, and a stern resistance from the watchful New Mexicans.

But the spears and arrows were running low, and ammunition for the flintlocks was scarce.

Xavier realized that unless the men returned soon the tower would be taken and the inmates massacred.

Even as this entered his mind, the Apaches bounded forward with a huge beam for a battering ram, and dealt the foundations several stunning blows before they could be repulsed, while at the same moment half-a-dozen of their companions gained the wall, and from this point of vantage shot their arrows into the windows of the tower.

But what hope was there that the men would return? They were miles away, on the banks of the Gila, perhaps searching for the cunning Apaches, and little dreaming that they had circled and gone back to commit more depredations, for Xavier had no doubt that these were the very Indians—or a part of them at least—who had devastated Pulco.

He bravely tried to repress his fears, but with each moment the outlook grew darker, and when another assault from the battering-ram loosened some of the great stones of the tower, he saw that something desperate must be done. Perhaps some one could escape from the town and go for aid. Glancing over the wall at the horses picketed on the plain, hope flashed into his heart.

He called the people around him, and briefly told how great the peril was. Then he pointed to the horses.

"Pedro, Maneul," he cried, "one of you must go for aid. You are fleet-footed. You can easily capture one of the horses and get away. I will remain and guard the tower till your return."

But they refused.

"The risk is too great," they replied, "we will surely be caught."

There were none willing to go.

Xavier hesitated.

He wished to go himself, but he felt as though it would be cowardly to abandon his friends.

But there was no other way, so, bidding all be of good cheer, and fight well, he tied one end of his riata to a projection in the tower and dropped the other over the wall.

A careful glance showed him half-a-dozen Apaches standing about the gates. He was nearer the horses than they by half-a-dozen yards.

Singling out the best-looking mustang, a powerful bay that was picketed on the edge near the town, he slid rapidly down the lasso hand over hand, and dropped to the ground.

With every muscle strained, he sprang forward, and was half way to the goal, when a chorus of yells rose from his rear. He was discovered. This only spurred him to greater efforts, and in a few seconds he sprang with a bound to the back of the chosen horse, severed the riata with his keen-edged knife and was off like the wind, bending low to avoid the shower of arrows and spears that whizzed by his head.

He rode straight to the westward, digging his heels into the mustang's flanks, and looking backward from

time to time at the half-dozen mounted Apaches who were riding furiously in pursuit.

His steed was a fine animal, and, one by one, he distanced his foes until a solitary warrior remained, who was mounted as superbly as himself.

All efforts to shake him off were vain, and for miles the distance between them remained unchanged.

Then Xavier discovered that his own horse was giving out, and a glance showed that the Apache was steadily gaining.

He was armed with a bow and spear, too, while Xavier had only a knife. His sole hope lay in keeping ahead, and he employed every possible device to drive his horse onward.

But the hoofs of the Apache's mustang rang still clearer in his ear, and suddenly an arrow whizzed by his head.

Crouching low on his steed's neck, Xavier still urged the jaded beast forward, but that instant a second arrow struck the horse in the flank, and his rider was pitched headforemost to the ground.

Xavier rose and staggered blindly toward the crest of the ridge before him, but his merciless foe was almost at his heels, and in a few seconds all would be over.

Already the savage whoop of triumph rose on the air, and the spear was poised for a fatal cast when a loud report was heard, and the Apache fell lifeless from his horse. Xavier looked up to see the men of Aracena, led by his own father, riding over the crest of the ridge.

The lad's story was quickly told, and in hot haste the men galloped toward the town, Xavier mounted behind his father.

They arrived barely in time, for the watch tower was tottering on its foundations, and the inmates had used their last spear and fired their last charge.

The Apaches fled in confusion, but the New Mexicans pursued them closely, and many were slain before they reached the banks of the Gila.

Of course, Xavier's brave exploit made him a hero, and for many years afterward the tale of his defense of Aracena was a household story at New Mexican firesides.

The Shields and Ryall Bout.

(By Karl Dannenburg, N. Y.)

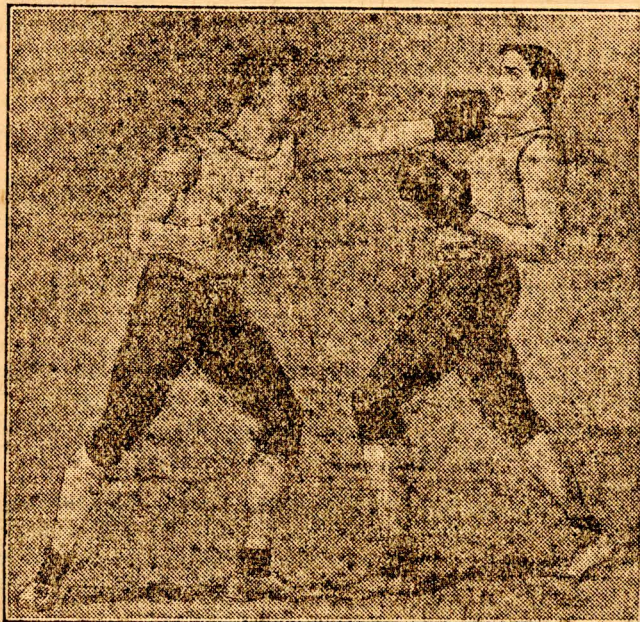
When I was in Philadelphia I witnessed the fight between Grassy Shields and Lew Ryall. From the start of the first round Ryall went out to score a knockout. He rushed at Shields in savage style, but the latter stood it bravely, and gave Ryall as good as he sent. At the end of the first round Ryall hit Shields a knockout, but the bell saved him. The second and third rounds were a repetition of the first.

Ryall had the better of the fourth, for he closed one of Shield's eyes. But Shields came up strong in the fifth round, for he hit Ryall a swing in the jaw and would have followed it up, but the bell saved Ryall.

The men fought hard in the last round until a minute before the close, when the punishment he had received began to tell on Shields.

Ryall sailed into him and landed both hands hard on Shield's face, but the bell rang before he put his man out.

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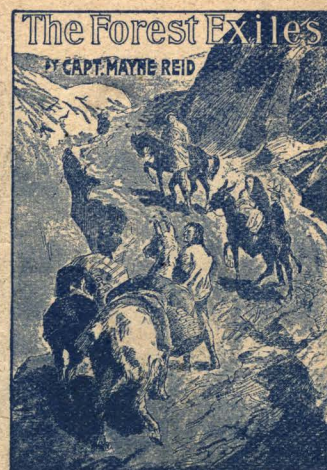
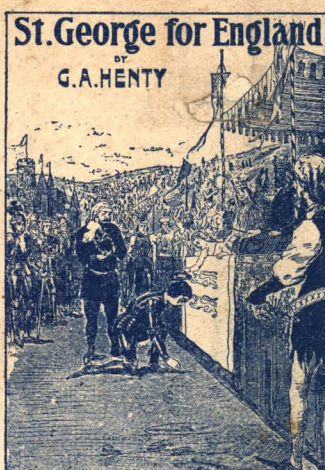
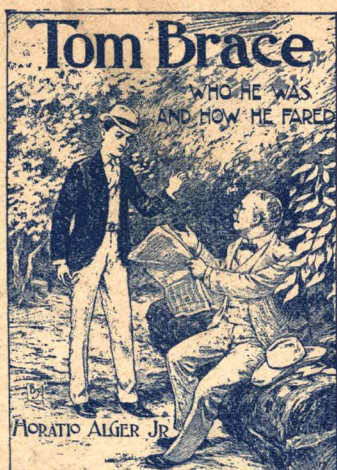
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